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Permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources

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Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan

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Note by the Secretary-General

In its resolution 1997/67 of 25 July 1995, entitled "Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan", the Economic and Social Council requested the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, through the Council, a report on the implementation of the resolution. The General Assembly, in its resolution 52/207 of 18 December 1997, reiterated the request for a report. The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the members of the Assembly and the Council the annexed report, covering the period from June 1997 to May 1998, which was prepared by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

* A/53/50.
** E/1998/100.

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Annex

Report prepared by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 52/207 of 18 December 1997, aware of the additional, detrimental economic and social impact of the Israeli settlements on Palestinian and other Arab natural resources, especially the confiscation of land and the forced diversion of water resources, took note of the report of the Secretary-General on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli settlements on the Palestinian people in the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, occupied since 1967, and on the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan (A/52/172-E/1997/71 and Corr.1), reaffirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the population of the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources, including land and water, and requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its fifty-third session a report on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution. The present report is submitted in response to that request and covers developments through May 1998.

II. Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation

2. The stalling peace process has caused severe hardships to the Palestinians in the occupied territory as well as to the Arab population of the occupied Syrian Golan. Israeli occupation policies and closures of the occupied territories continued to aggravate the living conditions of the Palestinian people.

3. Israeli settlements have been built at some 200 sites seized by civilian and military bodies representing the Government of Israel, as well as by Israeli civilians empowered by Israel to undertake such activity. The land under exclusive Israeli control amounts to about 72 per cent of the West Bank (area C) and 40 per cent of the Gaza Strip. In addition, 30 per cent of the area of East Jerusalem is under effective Israeli ownership. No similar estimates are available for the Golan Heights, where some 15,000 inhabitants of Syrian nationality are living in a few villages close to the Syrian-Lebanese border.[1]

4. Israel has established approximately 150 settlements in the West Bank, with a civilian population of 170,000; in East Jerusalem, approximately 180,000 Israelis are resident; in the Gaza Strip, 5,500 settlers live in 16 settlements; and in the Golan Heights, 15,000 settlers reside in 36 settlements. By the end of 1998, more than 350,000 Israelis will be living in over 200 communities established since 1967 in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights.[2]

5. The Jabal Abu Ghneim (Har Homa) project represents a specific example of this policy. Although Israel's decision to establish the new settlement at Jabal Abu Ghneim is considered a violation of international law and the agreements and understandings reached regarding Jerusalem, the present Government has declared that it has no intention of halting or suspending the project. It is intended to become one of the largest settlement projects initiated to date. It is located south of Jerusalem and overlooks the cities of Bethlehem and Beit Sahour. The area of the land set aside for the project amounts to 1,850 dunums (a dunum is equal to approximately 1,000 square metres); the master plan covers an area of 2,056 dunums. In the first stage, this settlement is expected to accommodate 4,000 settlers in 1,000 housing units, gradually increasing to 30,000 settlers occupying some 6,500 units in the final stage.[3]

6. The second half of 1997 witnessed an explosion in building construction throughout the occupied territories. New construction has been observed at 93 of the 130 settlements in the West Bank, in settlements close to Jerusalem, as well as isolated posts in the West Bank heartland. Because of their distance from existing facilities, at least 13 of these construction sites could be characterized as new settlements, although they are considered by Israel to be part of existing settlements. Press reports in Israel place the number of new units under construction at 5,000 during 1997. Other sources have confirmed the approval and initial construction of 4,000 units in West Bank settlements, enough to increase the settler population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by more than 10 per cent. There are currently more than 160,000 Israelis living in 45,000 units in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.[4]

7. The situation of Israeli settlements expansion in the occupied territories, at the end of 1997, could be summarized as follows:

A. Settler population

West Bank: 165,000
Gaza Strip: 5,500
Golan Heights: 15,000
East Jerusalem: 180,000

B. Settlement expansion

New settlement areas established: 13
New dwellings begun in settlements: 4,500-5,000

C. Number of new dwellings formally approved

(August 1996-March 1998): 2,268

D. Number of units sold in West Bank settlements: 1,560

E. Number of units completed in West Bank settlements: 4,000

F. Total lands confiscated in 1997: 25,000 dunums

Bypass roads: 4,951 dunums
New settlements: 723 dunums
Settlement expansion: 14,784
Industrial settlements: 4,480

G. Palestinian homes demolished by the Israel Defence Forces, area C: 233 in 1997

290 from January 1997 to March 1998

Sources: Foundation for Middle East Peace. *Report on Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Territories* (Washington, D.C., March 1998), pp. 1-2; Khalil Tufakji, Orient House; Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment, e-mail communication, 24 April 1998.

8. The plans of the Ministry of Housing and Construction for 1998 include tendering land for the first 1,000 units to be built in the settlement of Har Homa, as well as 820 units in the "greater Jerusalem" settlement of Givat Ze'ev. These allocations are part of a 1998 programme to tender more than 27 per cent of the national total of 23,000 units in land occupied in 1967, a goal which, if implemented, will indicate a significant campaign of intended settlement expansion.[4]

9. Settlement expansion in the West Bank appears to be occurring not only in those settlements within easy commuting distance of Jerusalem and the Tel Aviv metropolis, but also in the rural, isolated outposts throughout the West Bank. The increasing dependence on market forces in the housing market appears not to have stopped the expansion of settlements in these latter areas.

10. Since 1967, only 12 per cent of all new construction in Jerusalem has taken place in the Arab sector. During the period 1977-1983, for example, 90 per cent of construction was for Israelis. The figure translates into an annual pace of apartment construction of 2,170 for Israelis and only 230 for Palestinians. Housing construction for Israelis in East Jerusalem, occupied since 1967, has been critical to the overall growth of the city. The 180,000 Israelis who today live in this area comprise 76 per cent of the total increase in Jerusalem's Jewish population since 1967.[5]

11. Government restrictions on Palestinian housing construction, and the complementary boom in Israeli construction that has seen more than 40,000 apartment units built in East Jerusalem settlement communities, have ensured that Palestinians today comprise no greater a share of the city's population than they did in 1967. An additional 46,300 housing units are planned for the entire city. Out of these, about 10,000 will be built on 14,000 dunums (3,500 acres) of Israeli territory included in West Jerusalem in May 1996. An additional 17,710 units will be located in East Jerusalem settlement communities.[6]

12. The "urban sprawl" evident in the new Israeli neighbourhoods and settlements built within the municipal boundary of East Jerusalem since 1967 provides a yardstick to measure Israel's intention to maintain its exclusive sovereign hold over Jerusalem.

13. The settlements established in East Jerusalem after 1967 serve as a springboard for large-scale expansion of similar Israeli settlement suburbs in a second West Bank ring around all of East Jerusalem, beyond the city itself to the area around Jerusalem, strategically positioned between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River.

14. During the next 15 years, the outer ring of settlements of greater Jerusalem can be expected to accommodate more than 200,000 new settlers, in addition to the 50,000 currently residing there. During this period, completion of the Israeli suburban sections within Jerusalem itself (Har Homa and other locations) is expected to increase the number of East Jerusalem's 180,000 Israeli citizens to at least 250,000. In that sense, settlement expansion in East Jerusalem continues to play a crucial role in offsetting Palestinian population growth. This increase in Israel's settler population will bring the total number of Israeli settlers in and around Arab East Jerusalem by the year 2015 to 500,000. The Palestinian population is expected to double over the same period, to 1.5

million within greater Jerusalem and to 1 million in the metropolitan region.[7]

15. The scheme[8] for development of this area has significance beyond the territorial area that it encompasses, demonstrating the degree to which settlement expansion has been integrated into Israel's national planning schemes. E-1 controls the main axis of socio-economic development for Israel itself, as outlined in Israel's metropolitan master plan, completed in 1994-1995. This critical area runs along the trajectory of road 45, which originates in greater Tel Aviv and leads via Ben Gurion Airport – with expansion planned in conjunction with large industrial zones around the new city of Modi'in to greater Jerusalem at the West Bank settlement of Givat Ze'ev. The road continues along the recently developed archeological site next to the Prophet Samuel's tomb – to be surrounded at a distance by gentrified housing estates – and passes the East Jerusalem settlement community of Ramot and the expanding high-technology industrial park of Har Hotzvim to arrive at the projected "Eastern Gate" settlement site in East Jerusalem. From there it passes to Ma'ale Adumim, with its industrial zone, also scheduled to expand greatly, and another large residential area projected at Tibek Kuteif, on the heights above the Jordan Valley.

16. In 1967, 2,300 square kilometres of the West Bank and Gaza Strip were under Palestinian cultivation. In 1989, the figure had been reduced to 1,945 square kilometres, or 31.5 per cent of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Agriculture comprised 24 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 1966, the same percentage as in the period 1980-1985. By 1994, the percentage had decreased to less than 15 per cent.[9] In 1966, the agricultural sector provided employment for 55,000, or 43 per cent of total employment, whereas in the period 1980-1985, there were 40,000 employed in the agricultural sector, comprising 24 per cent of those Palestinians employed.[10] In 1993, the percentage of employed persons working in agriculture was 22 per cent.[11]

17. These gross indicators, however, cannot lead to any specific conclusions regarding the real effect of settlements on agricultural employment or production, or land under cultivation. Settlements are only one of a number of variables that must be considered when assessing these trends.

18. In this context, there are regions such as the Jordan Valley where a direct link can be established between the loss of Palestinians' agricultural opportunities and Israeli settlements. Contamination by sewage also directly affects Palestinian agriculture, albeit on a smaller scale, in the region around Kiryat Arba near Hebron. The confiscation of agricultural lands and their transfer to settlements, which has occurred on numerous occasions, may well result in loss of agricultural income and employment, though this has never been quantified beyond anecdotal reporting. There are also costs associated with Israeli-owned industries in the occupied territories, such as a recycling plant for used motor oil, stone quarries and other plants where harmful and toxic by-products are produced.

19. Limited access to water remains the greatest obstacle to Palestinian agricultural development. According to a recent report by Miriam Lowi for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, almost the entire increase in Israeli water use since 1967 derives from the waters of the West Bank and the upper Jordan River.[12] However, Israel is today in the midst of a water emergency. Even with the resources conquered in 1967, it is pumping more water from aquifers than nature can replace. And in the West Bank, not only is Israel exploiting water for its own population in Israel and the occupied territories, amounting to 15 per cent of total consumption, it is also preventing the Palestinian community from increasing its water use to barely 20 per cent beyond the amount used in 1967, and only for personal use, not for agriculture and economic development. "The status quo", wrote Leopold Laufer in a recent report for an Israeli think tank, "has effectively barred economic development in the territories and in Gaza".[13]

20. In both the bilateral and multilateral negotiations which began in Madrid, Israel has sought to protect its continuing control over this resource in the West Bank, which was described by Israel's State Comptroller in February 1993 as the principal reservoir of drinking water for the Dan region, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Beersheba, and the most important long-term source in the national water system.[13]

21. The water requirements of Israel's settlements in the occupied territories are a small segment of this larger mosaic of Israeli exploitation of the water resources in the occupied territories.

22. At a time when settlers were barely 10 per cent of the Palestinian population in the West Bank (1987), Palestinian consumption totalled 115 cm^3 while settler consumption equalled 97 cm^3.[14] A report by Peace Now noted that the Jewish settlers' per capita irrigated areas are 7 and 13 times larger than the areas accorded to the Palestinians for irrigation in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, respectively.[14]

23. A report prepared by the Jerusalem Media and Communication Center in November 1992 notes that lack of water has forced Palestinian farmers to remove tracts from cultivation and that the digging of new deep wells for

settlements, particularly in the Jordan Valley, has caused subsequent shortages for Palestinian farmers.[15]

24. There are approximately 260 Israeli-owned industrial concerns in the West Bank. For Israeli industrialists, the West Bank has, at least in one sphere, enjoyed a comparative advantage over Israel.[16] Environmental regulations on soil, air and water quality, and restrictions on industrial development, have generally been far less comprehensive and much less enforced in the occupied territories compared to Israel proper. Combined with state-subsidized incentives for Israeli concerns to locate to industrial parks in and nearby settlements, the relative laxity of environmental enforcement and monitoring has led to the relocation of polluting industries into the occupied territories.

25. The factories posing an environmental risk generally utilize wet processes in the industrial sectors of packaged food, manufacturing, metal coating and textiles.[17]

26. The Shomron Municipal Environmental Association, a governmental body established by settlements in the northern part of the West Bank to monitor and improve environmental quality, acknowledges that "waste-water effluents from these plants and from nearly 100 residential communities in our region, if not properly treated, pose a threat to the groundwater quality in the region. In addition, industrial air emissions and noise generation can be problematic at some factories".[18]

27. There are 45 concerns operating in the industrial park of Burkan adjacent to the settlement of Ariel. Most are engaged in the production of fabric and plastics for export. The owners of these factories escape the tighter rules on health and the environment inside Israel itself to work in the West Bank where they get tax breaks.[19] In addition to Burkan, Palestinians have complained about the operation of industrial facilities at Ariel, Karne Shomron, Kiryat Arba, and Adumim.[20] Of particular concern is the effect of industrial development on the quality of groundwater, which Palestinian investigators have found to be "significantly more polluted" near settlements than elsewhere.[20]

28. The settlement of Kiryat Arba has been identified by Palestinian investigators as "the main source of pollution in the Hebron area".[21] A tile factory located in the settlement's industrial area was flushing its wastewater through the sewage system, resulting in numerous problems. The city of Hebron successfully petitioned the court to stop this practice. The wastewater is now trucked off in tanks and dumped on Palestinian fields.[21] The water contains high levels of calcium carbonate, increasing the already high pH level of the land.

29. Geshurei Industries, a manufacturer of pesticides and fertilizers, was originally located in the Israeli town of Kfar Saba. Public concern about the environmental effects of the factory – on land, public health and agriculture – resulted in an Israeli court order in 1982 closing the plant. Since 1987, the factory has been operating across the Green Line, in Tulkarm, where there are effectively no controls on waste disposal or air pollution. Other Israeli industrial polluters, including those working in the fields of asbestos, fibreglass, pesticides and flammable gases, also relocated to the Tulkarm area. According to a report by the Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment, the factory pollution directly affects 144 dunums of prime agricultural land and causes substantial damage to the public health.[22] The Israeli court has ordered some remedial action, including compensation to affected farmers, but the plant remains in operation.

30. The same report notes severe negative effects of the factory operation on the nearby community, including decay of a majority of trees and other vegetation around the plant, chemical dust and residue and a liquid substance causing a decrease in productivity in field and hot house agriculture, and factory by-products, including sodium and salt, prominent in soil samples of land found to be non-arable. These effects are a consequence of factory by-products and waste-water contamination of agricultural land.

31. The report further points to clear evidence of polluting groundwater through leakage of chemicals, and proof of the improper disposal of wastes and by products.[22]

32. The report also documented a very high ratio of health-related problems among farmers and people living around the factory, including severe headaches, itchy eyes, spastic and chronic coughs and bronchial asthma.[22] The Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture notes that the public health of the community has not been well-documented owing to decades of military occupation and direct conflict, suggesting that environmentally related health problems may be more pervasive than currently estimated. The long-term impact on soil and groundwater has similarly received inadequate attention.[23]

33. As a consequence of the harmful effects of Israeli-operated industry around Tulkarm, the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture estimated that 17 per cent of Tulkarm's agricultural land has been affected by pollution originating at the six Israeli concerns that have located in the Tulkarm area. Three of the factories are sited on what Palestinians claim to be Waqf land. Other sites are claimed by private Palestinian owners. Several factories are located less than 100 metres from residential housing.[23]

34. There are hundreds of sites for the disposal of trash in the occupied territories, including dozens that are unauthorized. There are 246 sites in the West Bank north of Jerusalem alone. Most of the sites are simple, primitive sites with few if any environmental safeguards. And none is used exclusively by settlements or Palestinian communities. The Shomron Municipal Environmental Association acknowledges that the sites are improperly maintained, generating odours and smoke which are a nuisance to neighbouring residents, as well as posing a threat to groundwater quality.[24]

35. The site in Jiyous near Kalkilya is typical. Located on 12 dunums, 200 metres from the wadi that serves as a source of drinking water for the village of Azoun, the site opened in 1990. It is used principally by the settlements of Karnei Shomron, Keddu and Ma'al Shomron. The Shomron Municipal Environment Association is now being pressured by trash contractors in Israel to permit them to use the dump for trash generated in Israel, after the Israeli dump they had been using was closed by the Israeli Government.[25]

36. Sites such as the one at Jiyous are attractive trash disposal options for Israeli communities. With disposal costs three to six times greater in Israel, sites in the West Bank offer many Israeli towns a closer, cheaper alternative to dumps within Israel itself.

37. Israel conducted a geographical information system study in 1996 as part of an effort to develop a master plan to establish an order of priorities to improve and consolidate the system of trash disposal in the West Bank. The master plan for trash disposal in the West Bank is being conducted exclusively by Israel, without official or informal Palestinian participation.

38. The mitigation of environmental problems in the occupied territories, including those caused by the existence and expansion of settlements, are viewed by Israelis as a forum for joint Israeli-Palestinian action. Yet, Israeli environmental planners in the territories continue to view Palestinians as junior partners, at best. Palestinians, for their part, are willing to cooperate with Israeli communities within Israel's pre-1967 borders, but they refuse, as a matter of principle, to participate in joint efforts with settlers.[25]

39. Palestinians have traditionally made up the bulk of the workforce engaged in the construction and daily maintenance of settlements throughout the occupied territories. Some 12,000 Palestinian labourers work in Israeli settlements; 3,500 work in the Erez industrial zone and settlements in the Gaza Strip, and 8,500 in industrial parks and settlements in the West Bank[26] not including those working in the settlement communities of East Jerusalem.

40. The unemployment situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip remains critical, in particular owing to closures and increased reliance of Israel on expatriate workers from outside the region. The number of Palestinian workers in Israel dropped from an average of 120,000 on a monthly basis in 1992 to an average of about 25,000 in 1996.[27]

41. The overall economic environment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip inhibits investment and growth owing to the continued ambiguity of the legal and political situation. According to the Palestinian Economic Policy Research Institute, "the complex overlay of laws and Israeli military orders in force during the occupation remains in place. This is further aggravated by border closures which include banning movement of goods, factors of production and people between the Palestinian areas and Israel and the Gaza Strip, and between the rest of the West Bank and Jerusalem. Closure also often entails banning movement between the West Bank, Jordan and the Gaza Strip".[28]

42. In the period 1993-1996, there were a total of 342 days of closure affecting the Gaza Strip and 291 days in the West Bank. In 1996 alone, closures increased over the year before by 57 per cent in the West Bank and 35 per cent in the Gaza Strip. The 1996 closures differed from those in preceding years in that they were in effect for much longer periods, which has a significant effect on the continuity and regularity of production, marketing, income generation and employment.[29]

43. Frequent Israeli closures have been a major factor behind the 18 per cent drop in gross national product (GNP) in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the 35 per cent drop in per capita GNP between 1992 and 1996. In addition, in 1997 gross domestic product (GDP) was estimated to have grown by 1.2 per cent, down from 5.5 per cent in 1996, as estimated by the Palestinian Authority and the International Monetary Fund, while the population growth was estimated at 4.5 per cent, thus explaining the further deterioration in GDP per capita in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.[30]

44. However, economic indicators show that the actual deterioration in standards of living has been far more dramatic in the West Bank, with a 19.7 per cent loss of per capita GDP compared with 8.4 per cent in the Gaza Strip in the period 1993-1995. This drop does not reflect the further deterioration, which occurred with the lengthy closures and widespread confrontations in later years.[31]

45. Frequent closures have also negatively affected trade, particularly exports from the territories, causing long delays at the border which are detrimental to export goods, particularly vegetables and fruits. In addition, the delay in arrival of raw materials from Israel to the West Bank and

Gaza Strip leads to the upsetting of production plans and to a lowering of capacity utilization.[32]

46. Bank lending and deposits in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have been modest. In 1997, lending remained at about 19 per cent of the total assets, reflecting a depressed demand for credit by investors. The relatively low deposit/GDP ratio was, at the end of 1996, about 57.5 per cent. A further substantial increase in total bank deposits is not, however, expected to take place before a successful conclusion of final status negotiations. Owing to political uncertainties, many residents maintain bank accounts abroad.[33]

47. Tourism, which was one of the first economic sectors to benefit from the peace dividend as it boomed during the period 1994-1995, has been hit by the stalemate in the peace process. According to the Palestinian Economic Policy Research Institute, "the Israeli authorities refuse to issue permits for new hotels or for expanding existing ones in East Jerusalem. This resulted in the freezing of the number of rooms at Arab-owned hotels in East Jerusalem at their 1967 level while the number of rooms at hotels operating in the rest of the West Bank and Gaza Strip declined. As a result of Israeli licensing policies, the number of Palestinian guides in East Jerusalem dropped from 154 in 1967 to 47 in 1995, and their number in the rest of the West Bank and Gaza Strip was down to 24 in 1995, six of whom were newly licensed by the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism. Furthermore, the fact that the Israeli authorities neglected the infrastructure in the West Bank and Gaza Strip has made it difficult for the tourism sector to attract new investments".[34] Visitors to the West Bank and Gaza Strip still come through Israeli airports. Palestinian travel agents are prevented from meeting arriving clients and there are no tourist bus companies based in the West Bank outside East Jerusalem.[35]

48. While incentives and investment continued to promote the Israeli civilian presence in the Syrian Golan, the Arab population faces further deterioration in their living conditions owing to Israeli settlements, restrictions on employment opportunities and education, as well as the Israeli taxation policy.[36]

49. In the Golan Heights, there are currently 15,000 Israelis living in 33 settlement communities established in the wake of Israel's 1967 capture of the Golan Heights. The Syrian population, numbering an equal amount, resides in five villages in the Golan's north-eastern corner.[37]

50. Some 2,000 dwellings are in various stages of construction in the Golan settlements. The completion of some was frozen by previous governments. Others were rented to army officers stationed in the area. A few completed units remained empty in previous years because of the lack of demand in view of the uncertainty created by negotiations between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic over the Golan's future.[38]

51. In the months before Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu's election, this picture was already changing. After the collapse of the negotiations with the Syrian Arab Republic in February 1996, Prime Minister Shimon Peres ordered the sale of many of these apartments, and made building plots available for private construction. The last of the 700 units built during the past three years at Katzrin, the largest settlement, had already been sold. Katzrin's population grew by 50 per cent during this period, from 4,000 to 6,000. A full 20 per cent of the area's residents arrived during 1996.[39] Planning and site work for 1,000 additional units is currently under way. Some 115 new units for the Elad settlement were approved in April 1996.[40] And in May 1996, the Golan Regional Council began a drive to sell 250 units scattered throughout the area's 32 settlements.

52. Among the most prominent projects now under way are a $130 million tourism and hotel project at Hamat Gader, a deal between MacDonald's and the kibbutz settlement of Merom Golan to grow potatoes for the company's french fries on 300 dunums, and at the settlement of Ortal, a $4.5 million dairy, the largest in the Middle East.[41]

53. The election of Prime Minister Netanyahu changed the context in which Israelis evaluate the prospects of a life in the Golan. Since his victory, housing prices have appreciated by 50 per cent in some settlements. Even so, in July 1996, the United States company Office Depot pulled out of a manufacturing joint venture in the Golan Heights because of the Golan's uncertain future.

54. At meetings with Golan settlers soon after his election, the Prime Minister reiterated his commitment to increase Katzrin's population to 15,000 during his tenure. He also announced his approval of the "Golan 2000" plan presented to him before the election. The plan calls for a $202 million public sector investment in infrastructure, and new housing construction in 10 settlements, to reach the goal of increasing the plateau's Israeli population by 10,000 during the next four years.[42]

55. On 20 January 1997, construction began on 600 new units at the settlements of Hmat Ghadar, Ramot and Gamla.[43] "In fact", noted *Ma'ariv* on 30 December 1996, "we are speaking of an 'expansion plan' according to which new settlements will be established in the Golan, under the rubric of 'expanding' existing settlements".[44] Three new settlements will be established as part of the first stage of the expansion. Despite such efforts to increase the Golan settler population, by May 1996 settlement leaders were

complaining that there was an "enormous gap" between settlement plans and their actual implementation.[45]

56. At the outset of a campaign to expand residential construction and to increase the settler population – part of the "Golan 2000" programme – settlement leaders reported that the settler population in the Golan is to increase by 10,000 to more than 25,000 by the year 2000.[46]

57. Settlement leader Yehuda Wolman reported that 1,600 units had been constructed in the period 1989-1996, at a rate averaging 225 units annually. He also noted that of the 14,000 Israelis residing in the Golan, 3,000 are employed by the local government council, and one third are engaged in agriculture. In 1996, agricultural production reached $240 million, while industrial production reached $100 million, tourism $40 million, sales and services $50 million, and public services $20 million. Investment in industrial production amounted to $16 million in the period 1992-1996.[47] Settlement expansion is concentrated at the settlement of Katzrin, with a current population of 7,000, the largest among 32 Golan settlements. Three hundred new units were begun in mid-1997 and formal approval from the Minister of Defence was awaited to begin construction of an additional 1,000 units. To enable construction of the 1,000 units, the municipal area of Katzrin was expanded by 1,200 dunums bordering a nature reserve.[48]

58. For the first time since the beginning of Israeli settlement in the Golan, a private sector contractor, as opposed to government companies, undertook a residential construction project. The 300 cottages being built at Katzrin sell for $95,000 to $110,000. The State provides subsidized grants, benefits and loans comprising 90 per cent of this amount.[48] For example, beginning in October 1997, 35 building plots were marketed in the settlement of Katzrin as part of the popular "build your own house" programme. The one-half dunum plots were offered at no cost. Buyers were required to pay $10,000 towards development costs, one half the actual investment by the State. By mid-December, more than 100 prospective buyers had signed up for the 35 available lots.[49]

59. A number of incentives were adopted to attract prospective Israeli settlers into the Golan Heights, including individual grants of 50,000 shekels (equivalent to US$ 16,500) and mortgage facilities as high as 95 per cent of the value of the house, with generous repayment terms.[50] In addition, substantial state subsidies are provided in various economic sectors to strengthen the Israeli settlements policy. This includes an ongoing plan for the development of tourism in the Golan Heights, which is estimated at about US$ 5.5 million. Of that sum, $4 million is in the form of government funding. The Ministry of Tourism sponsors this project, in cooperation with the Jewish agency and the local council of settlements in the Golan.[51]

60. Employment opportunities for the Syrian Arab population in the Golan Heights is extremely restricted, since the movement of the Arab population between the Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic remains problematic, even more so with the current stalled peace process. Hence, the only employment opportunities available to the Syrian population in the Golan is limited to unskilled and semi-skilled daily wage labour. In most conditions, these workers have no access to social benefits, and health insurance and are under constant threat of being made redundant with no compensation. In addition, a substantial differential in wages prevails, to the detriment of the Syrian Arab population of the Golan.[52] Furthermore, improvement of living conditions is further aggravated owing to restrictions on expanding educational facilities, facilitation of education in the Syrian Arab Republic and access to education in Israeli colleges.[53]

61. The Arab population living in the Golan are subjected to prohibitive levels of taxation, including tax on income, health services, local councils, land and housing ownership, value added, ownership of cattle and use of water resources. Such measures have systematically deterred the Arab population from investing in agricultural or small-scale industrial development and have incited many of them to give up farming, or move to other areas and seek wage labour employment.[54]

Notes

[1] Based on the report of the Civil Administration for the West Bank, chart 8.7 (no date).

[2] Based on the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, *The Socio-Economic Impact of Israeli Settlements* (to be issued shortly).

[3] Israeli attorney Daniel Seidemann, as quoted in Foundation for Middle East Peace, *Report on Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Territories* (Washington, D.C., March 1997), p. 8.

[4] Foundation for Middle East Peace, *Report on Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Territories* (Washington, D.C., March 1998), p. 1.

[5] Nadav Shargay, in *Ha'aretz*, 31 May 1992.

[6] Foundation for Middle East Peace, *Report on Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Territories* (Washington, D.C., July 1997), p. 1.

[7] Jan de Jong, in "Greater Jerusalem", a special report of the Foundation for Middle East Peace (Washington, D.C., summer 1997), p. 4SR.

[8] E-1 Development Plan and Environment 1998, E-1 analysis, presented in "E-1 settlement expansion plans – preempting the growth of Arab Jerusalem", a special report of the Foundation for Middle East Peace (Washington, D.C., winter 1998).

[9] Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel, 1995, p. 764.

[10] Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel, 1995 and 1992.

[11] Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel, 1995, p. 776.

[12] Miriam Lowi, "West Bank water resources and the resolution of conflict in the Middle East", American Academy of Arts and Sciences, September 1992.

[13] *Al-Wasat*, 21 April 1993.

[14] Peace Now, "The real map – a demographic and demographical analysis of the population of the West Bank and Gaza Strip" (Jerusalem, January 1993).

[15] "Israeli obstacles to economic development in the occupied territories", report prepared by the Jerusalem Media and Communications Center, November 1992, p. 49.

[16] Aookued Research Institute, "Environmental profile of the West Bank" (Jerusalem, no date).

[17] Shomron Municipal Environmental Association Report (no date), p. 5.

[18] Ibid., p. 6.

[19] Hisham Abdallah, "A tour of the West Bank: from settlement to settlement", *Agence France Presse*, 17 October 1997.

[20] The Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment, "Water quality in the West Bank" (October 1996), p. 6.

[21] The Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment, op. cit., p. 9.

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[32] Palestinian Economic Policy Research Institute, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

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Permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources

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Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan

Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan

Note by the Secretary-General

In its resolution 1997/67 of 25 July 1995, entitled "Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan", the Economic and Social Council requested the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, through the Council, a report on the implementation of the resolution. The General Assembly, in its resolution 52/207 of 18 December 1997, reiterated the request for a report. The annexed report, covering the period from June 1997 to May 1998, which was prepared by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, is being submitted in response to that request.

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Annex

Report prepared by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 52/207 of 18 December 1997, aware of the additional, detrimental economic and social impact of the Israeli settlements on Palestinian and other Arab natural resources, especially the confiscation of land and the forced diversion of water resources, took note of the report of the Secretary-General on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli settlements on the Palestinian people in the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, occupied since 1967, and on the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan (A/52/172-E/1997/71 and Corr.1), reaffirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the population of the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources, including land and water, and requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its fifty-third session a report on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution. The present report is submitted in response to that request and covers developments through May 1998. This report also constitutes a response to Economic and Social Council resolution 1997/67 of 25 July 1997.

II. Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation

2. The stalling peace process has been accompanied by continuing hardship for the Palestinians in the occupied territory as well as for the Arab population of the occupied Syrian Golan. Israeli occupation policies and closures of the occupied territories continued to aggravate the living conditions of the Palestinian people.

3. Israeli settlements have been built at some 200 sites seized by civilian and military bodies representing the Government of Israel, as well as by Israeli civilians empowered by Israel to undertake such activity. The land under exclusive Israeli control amounts to about 72 per cent of the West Bank (area C)[1] and 40 per cent of the Gaza Strip. In addition, 30 per cent of the area of East Jerusalem is under effective Israeli ownership. No similar estimates are available for the Golan Heights, where some 15,000 inhabitants of Syrian nationality are living in a few villages close to the Syrian-Lebanese border.[2]

4. Israel has established approximately 150 settlements in the West Bank, with a civilian population of 170,000; in East Jerusalem, approximately 180,000 Israelis are resident; in the Gaza Strip, 5,500 settlers live in 16 settlements; and in the Golan Heights, 15,000 settlers reside in 36 settlements. By the end of 1998, more than 350,000 Israelis will be living in over 200 communities established since 1967 in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights.[3]

5. The Jabal Abu Ghneim (Har Homa) project represents a specific example of this policy. Although Israel's decision to establish the new settlement at Jabal Abu Ghneim has been opposed in resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, the present Government has declared that it has no intention of halting or suspending the project. It is intended to become one of the largest settlement projects initiated to date. It is located south of Jerusalem and overlooks the cities of Bethlehem and Beit Sahour. The area of the land set aside for the project amounts to 1,850 dunums (a dunum is equal to approximately 1,000 square metres); the master plan covers an area of [illegible] dunums. In the first stage, this settlement is expected to accommodate 4,000 settlers in 1,000 housing units, gradually increasing to 30,000 settlers occupying some 6,500 units in the final stage.[4]

6. The second half of 1997 was marked by a substantial increase in building construction throughout the occupied territories. New construction has been observed at 93 of the 130 settlements in the West Bank, in settlements close to Jerusalem, as well as isolated posts in the West Bank heartland. Because of their distance from existing facilities, at least 13 of these construction sites could be characterized as new settlements, although they are considered by Israel to be part of existing settlements. Press reports in Israel place the number of new units under construction at 5,000 during 1997. Other sources have confirmed the approval and initial construction of 4,000 units in West Bank settlements, enough to increase the settler population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by more than 10 per cent. There are currently more than 160,000 Israelis living in 45,000 units in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.[5]

7. The situation of Israeli settlements expansion in the occupied territories, at the end of 1997, could be summarized as follows:

A. Settler population

West Bank: 165,000
Gaza Strip: 5,500
Golan Heights: 15,000
East Jerusalem: 180,000

B. Settlement expansion

New settlement areas established: 13
New dwellings begun in settlements: 4,500-5,000

C. Number of new dwellings formally approved (August 1996-March 1998): 2,268

D. Number of units sold in West Bank settlements: 1,560

E. Number of units completed in West Bank settlements: 4,000

F. Total lands confiscated in 1997: 25,000 dunums

Bypass roads: 4,951 dunums
New settlements: 723 dunums
Settlement expansion: 14,784
Industrial settlements: 4,480

G. Palestinian homes demolished by the Israel Defence Forces, area C: 233 in 1997

290 from January 1997 to March 1998

Sources: Foundation for Middle East Peace, *Report on Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Territories* (Washington, D.C., March 1998), pp. 1-2; Khalil Tufakji, Orient House, Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment, E-mail communication, 24 April 1998.

8. The plans of the Ministry of Housing and Construction for 1998 include tendering land for the first 1,000 units to be built in the settlement of Har Homa, as well as 820 units in the "greater Jerusalem" settlement of Givat Ze'ev. These allocations are part of a 1998 programme to tender more than 27 per cent of the national total of 23,000 units in land occupied in 1967, a goal which, if implemented, will indicate a significant campaign of intended settlement expansion.[5]

9. Settlement expansion in the West Bank appears to be occurring not only in those areas within easy commuting distance of Jerusalem and the Tel Aviv metropolis, but also in the rural, isolated outposts throughout the West Bank. The increasing dependence on market forces in the housing market appears not to have stopped the expansion of settlements in these latter areas.

10. Since 1967, only 12 per cent of all new construction in Jerusalem has taken place in East Jerusalem. During the period 1977-1983, for example, 90 per cent of construction was for Israelis. The figure translates into an annual pace of apartment construction of 2,170 for Israelis and only 230 for Palestinians. Housing construction for Israelis in East Jerusalem, occupied since 1967, has been critical to the overall growth of the city. The 180,000 Israelis who today live in this area comprise 76 per cent of the total increase in Jerusalem's Jewish population since 1967.[6]

11. Government restrictions on Palestinian housing construction, and the complementary boom in Israeli construction that has amounted to more than 40,000 apartment units built in East Jerusalem settlement communities, have ensured that Palestinians today comprise no greater a share of the city's population than they did in 1967. An additional 46,300 housing units are planned for the entire city. Out of these, about 10,000 will be built on 14,000 dunums (3,500 acres) of Israeli territory included in West Jerusalem in May 1996. An additional 17,710 units will be located in East Jerusalem settlement communities.[7]

12. During the next 15 years, the outer ring of settlements of greater Jerusalem might accommodate more than 200,000 new settlers, in addition to the 50,000 currently residing there, according to some estimates. During this period, completion of the Israeli suburban sections within Jerusalem itself (Har Homa and other locations) is expected to increase the number of East Jerusalem's 180,000 Israeli citizens to at least 250,000. In that sense, settlement expansion in East Jerusalem continues to play a crucial role in offsetting Palestinian population growth. This increase in Israel's settler population would bring the total number of Israeli settlers in and around East Jerusalem by the year 2015 to 500,000. The Palestinian population is expected to double over the same period, to 1.5 million within greater Jerusalem and to 1 million in the metropolitan region.[8]

13. The scheme[9] for development of this area has significance beyond the territory that it encompasses, demonstrating the degree to which settlement expansion has been integrated into Israel's national planning schemes. E-1 controls the main axis of socio-economic development for Israel itself, as outlined in the metropolitan master plan, completed in 1994-1995. This critical area runs along the trajectory of road 45, which originates in greater Tel Aviv and leads via Ben Gurion Airport – with expansion planned in conjunction with large industrial zones around the new city of Modi'in to greater Jerusalem at the West Bank settlement of Givat Ze'ev. The road continues along the recently developed archeological site next to the Prophet Samuel's tomb – to be surrounded at a distance by gentrified

housing estates – and passes the East Jerusalem settlement community of Ramot and the expanding high-technology industrial park of Har Hotzvim to arrive at the projected "Eastern Gate" settlement site in East Jerusalem. From there it passes to Ma'ale Adumim, with its industrial zone, also scheduled to expand greatly, and another large residential area projected at Tibek Kuteif, on the heights above the Jordan Valley.

14. In 1967, 2,300 square kilometres of the West Bank and Gaza Strip were under Palestinian cultivation. In 1989, the figure had been reduced to 1,945 square kilometres, or 31.5 per cent of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Agriculture comprised 24 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 1966, the same percentage as in the period 1980-1985. By 1994, the percentage had decreased to less than 15 per cent.[10] In 1966, the agricultural sector provided employment for 55,000, or 43 per cent of total employment, whereas in the period 1980-1985, there were 40,000 employed in the agricultural sector, comprising 24 per cent of those Palestinians employed.[11] In 1993, the percentage of employed persons working in agriculture was 22 per cent.[12]

15. These gross indicators, however, cannot lead to any specific conclusions regarding the real effect of settlements on agricultural employment or production, or land under cultivation. Settlements are only one of a number of variables that must be considered when assessing these trends.

16. In this context, there are regions such as the Jordan Valley where a direct link may be established between the loss of Palestinians' agricultural opportunities and Israeli settlements. Contamination by sewage also directly affects Palestinian agriculture, albeit on a smaller scale, in the region around Kiryat Arba near Hebron. The confiscation of agricultural lands and their transfer to settlements, which has occurred on numerous occasions, may well result in loss of agricultural income and employment, though this has never been quantified beyond anecdotal reporting. There are also costs associated with Israeli-owned industries in the occupied territories, such as a recycling plant for used motor oil, stone quarries and other plants where harmful and toxic by-products are produced.

17. Limited access to water remains the greatest obstacle to Palestinian agricultural development. According to a recent report by Miriam Lowi for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, almost the entire increase in Israeli water use since 1967 derives from the waters of the West Bank and the upper Jordan River.[13] However, Israel is today in the midst of a water emergency. Even with the resources acquired in 1967, it is pumping more water from aquifers than nature can replace. In the West Bank, Israel is exploiting water amounting to 15 per cent of total consumption for its own population in Israel and the occupied territories. It is also preventing the Palestinian community from increasing its water use to barely 20 per cent beyond the amount used in 1967, and only for personal use, not for agriculture and economic development. "The status quo", wrote Leopold Laufer in a recent report for an Israeli think tank, "has effectively barred economic development in the territories and in Gaza".[14]

18. In both the bilateral and multilateral negotiations which began in Madrid, Israel has sought to protect its continuing control over this resource in the West Bank, which was described by Israel's State Comptroller in February 1993 as the principal reservoir of drinking water for the Dan region, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Beersheba, and the most important long-term source in the national water system.[14]

19. In 1987, when settlers were barely 10 per cent of the Palestinian population in the West Bank, Palestinian consumption totalled 115 cm^3 while settler consumption equalled 97 cm^3.[15] A report by Peace Now noted that the Jewish settlers' per capita irrigated areas are 7 and 13 times larger than the areas accorded to the Palestinians for irrigation in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, respectively.[15]

20. A report prepared by the Jerusalem Media and Communication Center in November 1992 notes that lack of water has forced Palestinian farmers to remove tracts from cultivation and that the digging of new deep wells for settlements, particularly in the Jordan Valley, has caused subsequent shortages for Palestinian farmers.[15]

21. There are approximately 260 Israeli-owned industrial enterprises in the West Bank. Environmental regulations on soil, air and water quality, and restrictions on industrial development, have generally been far less comprehensive and much less enforced in the occupied territories compared to Israel proper.[17] Combined with state-subsidized incentives for Israeli concerns to locate to industrial parks in and nearby settlements, the relative laxity of environmental enforcement and monitoring has led to the relocation of polluting industries into the occupied territories.

22. The factories posing an environmental risk generally utilize wet processes in the industrial sectors of packaged food, manufacturing, metal coating and textiles.[18]

23. The Shomron Municipal Environmental Association, a governmental body established by settlements in the northern part of the West Bank to monitor and improve environmental quality, acknowledges that "waste-water

effluents from these plants and from nearly 100 residential communities in our region, if not properly treated, pose a threat to the groundwater quality in the region. In addition, industrial air emissions and noise generation can be problematic at some factories".[19]

24. There are 45 enterprises operating in the industrial park of Burkan adjacent to the settlement of Ariel. Most are engaged in the production of fabric and plastics for export. The owners of these factories escape the tighter rules on health and the environment inside Israel itself to work in the West Bank where they get tax breaks.[20] In addition to Burkan, Palestinians have complained about the operation of industrial facilities at Ariel, Karne Shomron, Kiryat Arba, and Adumim.[21] Of particular concern is the effect of industrial development on the quality of groundwater, which Palestinian investigators have found to be "significantly more polluted" near settlements than elsewhere.[21]

25. The settlement of Kiryat Arba has been identified by Palestinian investigators as "the main source of pollution in the Hebron area".[22] A tile factory located in the settlement's industrial area was flushing its wastewater through the sewage system, resulting in numerous problems. The city of Hebron successfully petitioned the court to stop this practice. The wastewater is now trucked off in tanks and dumped on Palestinian fields.[22] The water contains high levels of calcium carbonate, increasing the already high pH level of the land.

26. Geshurei Industries, a manufacturer of pesticides and fertilizers, was originally located in the Israeli town of Kfar Saba. Public concern about the environmental effects of the factory – on land, public health and agriculture – resulted in an Israeli court order in 1982 closing the plant. Since 1987, the factory has been operating across the Green Line, in Tulkarm, where there are effectively no controls on waste disposal or air pollution. Other Israeli industrial polluters, including those working in the fields of asbestos, fibreglass, pesticides and flammable gases, also relocated to the Tulkarm area. According to a report by the Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment, the factory pollution directly affects 144 dunums of prime agricultural land and causes substantial damage to the public health.[23] The Israeli court has ordered some remedial action, including compensation to affected farmers, but the plant remains in operation.

27. The same report notes severe negative effects of the factory operation on the nearby community, including decay of a majority of trees and other vegetation around the plant, chemical dust and residue and a liquid substance causing a decrease in productivity in field and hot house agriculture, and factory by-products, including sodium and salt, prominent in soil samples of land found to be non-arable. These effects are a consequence of factory by-products and waste-water contamination of agricultural land.

28. The report further points to clear evidence of polluting groundwater through leakage of chemicals, and proof of the improper disposal of wastes and by-products.[23]

29. The report also documented a very high ratio of health-related problems among farmers and people living around the factory, including severe headaches, itchy eyes, spastic and chronic coughs and bronchial asthma.[23] The Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture notes that the public health of the community has not been well documented owing to decades of military occupation and direct conflict, suggesting that environmentally related health problems may be more pervasive than currently estimated. The long-term impact on soil and groundwater has similarly received inadequate attention.[24]

30. As a consequence of the harmful effects of Israeli-operated industry around Tulkarm, the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture estimated that 17 per cent of Tulkarm's agricultural land has been affected by pollution originating at the six Israeli concerns that have located in the Tulkarm area. Three of the factories are sited on what Palestinians claim to be Waqf land. Other sites are claimed by private Palestinian owners. Several factories are located less than 100 metres from residential housing.[24]

31. There are hundreds of sites for the disposal of trash in the occupied territories, including dozens that are unauthorized. There are 246 sites in the West Bank north of Jerusalem alone. Most of the sites are simple, primitive sites with few if any environmental safeguards. And none is used exclusively by settlements or Palestinian communities. The Shomron Municipal Environmental Association acknowledges that the sites are improperly maintained, generating odours and smoke which are a nuisance to neighbouring residents, as well as posing a threat to groundwater quality.[25]

32. The site in Jiyous near Kalkilya is typical. Located on 12 dunums, 200 metres from the wadi that serves as a source of drinking water for the village of Azoun, the site opened in 1990. It is used principally by the settlements of Karnei Shomron, Keddu and Ma'al Shomron. The Shomron Municipal Environment Association is now being pressured by trash contractors in Israel to permit them to use the dump for trash generated in Israel, after the Israeli dump they had been using was closed by the Israeli Government.[25]

33. Israel conducted a geographical information system study in 1996 as part of an effort to develop a master plan to establish an order of priorities to improve and consolidate the system of trash disposal in the West Bank. The master plan for trash disposal in the West Bank is being conducted exclusively by Israel, without official or informal Palestinian participation.

34. There are literally thousands of stone quarries on the West Bank, supplying 80 per cent of the material needs of Israel's construction sector. Many of these stones are used in settlement construction.[26] The clouds of white dust produced by the quarries pose certain health risks. Recent reports note that those residing near such enterprises suffer from increased levels of asthma and acute bronchial infections.[27]

35. The mitigation of environmental problems in the occupied territories, including those caused by the existence and expansion of settlements, are viewed by Israelis as a forum for joint Israeli-Palestinian action. Yet, Israeli environmental planners in the territories continue to view Palestinians as junior partners, at best. Palestinians, for their part, are willing to cooperate with Israeli communities within Israel's pre-1967 borders, but they refuse, as a matter of principle, to participate in joint efforts with settlers.[26]

36. Palestinians have traditionally made up the bulk of the workforce engaged in the construction and daily maintenance of settlements throughout the occupied territories. Some 12,000 Palestinian labourers work in Israeli settlements; 3,500 work in the Erez industrial zone and settlements in the Gaza Strip, and 8,500 in industrial parks and settlements in the West Bank[27] not including those working in the settlement communities of East Jerusalem.

37. The unemployment situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip remains critical, in particular owing to closures and increased reliance of Israel on expatriate workers from outside the region. The number of Palestinian workers in Israel dropped from an average of 120,000 on a monthly basis in 1992 to an average of about 25,000 in 1996.[28]

38. The overall economic environment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip inhibits investment and growth owing to the continued ambiguity of the legal and political situation. According to the Palestinian Economic Policy Research Institute, "the complex overlay of laws and Israeli military orders in force during the occupation remains in place. This is further aggravated by border closures which include banning movement of goods, factors of production and people between the Palestinian areas and Israel and the Gaza Strip, and between the rest of the West Bank and Jerusalem. Closure also often entails banning movement between the West Bank, Jordan and the Gaza Strip".[29]

39. In the period 1993-1996, there were a total of 342 days of closure affecting the Gaza Strip and 291 days in the West Bank. In 1996 alone, closures increased over the year before by 57 per cent in the West Bank and 35 per cent in the Gaza Strip. The 1996 closures differed from those in preceding years in that they were in effect for much longer periods, which has a significant effect on the continuity and regularity of production, marketing, income generation and employment.[30]

40. Frequent Israeli closures have been a major factor behind the 18 per cent drop in gross national product (GNP) in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the 35 per cent drop in per capita GNP between 1992 and 1996. In addition, in 1997 gross domestic product (GDP) was estimated to have grown by 1.2 per cent, down from 5.5 per cent in 1996, as estimated by the Palestinian Authority and the International Monetary Fund, while the population growth was estimated at 4.5 per cent, thus explaining the further deterioration in GDP per capita in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.[31]

41. However, economic indicators show that the actual deterioration in standards of living has been far more dramatic in the West Bank, with a 19.7 per cent loss of per capita GDP compared with 8.4 per cent in the Gaza Strip in the period 1993-1995. This drop does not reflect the further deterioration, which occurred with the lengthy closures and widespread confrontations in later years.[32]

42. Frequent closures have also negatively affected trade, particularly exports from the territories, causing long delays at the border which are detrimental to export goods, particularly vegetables and fruits. In addition, the delay in arrival of raw materials from Israel to the West Bank and Gaza Strip leads to the upsetting of production plans and to a lowering of capacity utilization.[33]

43. Bank lending and deposits in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have been modest. In 1997, lending remained at about 19 per cent of the total assets, reflecting a depressed demand for credit by investors. The relatively low deposit/GDP ratio was, at the end of 1996, about 57.5 per cent. A further substantial increase in total bank deposits is not, however, expected to take place before a successful conclusion of final status negotiations. Owing to political uncertainties, many residents maintain bank accounts abroad.[34]

44. Tourism, which was one of the first economic sectors to benefit from the peace dividend as it boomed during the period 1994-1995, has been affected by the stalemate in the peace process. According to the Palestinian Economic Policy

Research Institute, "the Israeli authorities refuse to issue permits for new hotels or for expanding existing ones in East Jerusalem. This resulted in the freezing of the number of rooms at Arab-owned hotels in East Jerusalem at their 1967 level while the number of rooms at hotels operating in the rest of the West Bank and Gaza Strip declined. As a result of Israeli licensing policies, the number of Palestinian guides in East Jerusalem dropped from 154 in 1967 to 47 in 1995, and their number in the rest of the West Bank and Gaza Strip was down to 24 in 1995, six of whom were newly licensed by the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism. Furthermore, the fact that the Israeli authorities neglected the infrastructure in the West Bank and Gaza Strip has made it difficult for the tourism sector to attract new investments".[35] Visitors to the West Bank and Gaza Strip still come through Israeli airports. Palestinian travel agents are prevented from meeting arriving clients and there are no tourist bus companies based in the West Bank outside East Jerusalem.[36]

45. While incentives and investment continued to promote the Israeli civilian presence in the Syrian Golan, the Arab population faces further deterioration in their living conditions owing to Israeli settlements, restrictions on employment opportunities and education, as well as the Israeli taxation policy.[37]

46. In the Golan Heights, there are currently 15,000 Israelis living in 33 settlement communities established in the wake of Israel's 1967 capture of the Golan Heights. The Syrian population, numbering an equal amount, resides in five villages in the Golan's north-eastern corner.[38]

47. Some 2,000 dwellings are in various stages of construction in the Golan settlements. The completion of some was frozen by previous governments. Others were rented to army officers stationed in the area. A few completed units remained empty in previous years because of the lack of demand in view of the uncertainty created by negotiations between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic over the Golan's future.[39]

48. In the months before Prime Minister Netanyahu's election, this picture was already changing. After the collapse of the negotiations with the Syrian Arab Republic in February 1996, then Prime Minister Shimon Peres ordered the sale of many of these apartments, and made building plots available for private construction. The last of the 700 units built during the past three years at Katzrin, the largest settlement, had already been sold. Katzrin's population grew by 50 per cent during this period, from 4,000 to 6,000. A full 20 per cent of the area's residents arrived during 1996.[40] Planning and site work for 1,000 additional units is currently under way. Some 115 new units for the Elad settlement were approved in April 1996.[41] And in May 1996, the Golan Regional Council began a drive to sell 250 units scattered throughout the area's 32 settlements.

49. Among the most prominent projects now under way are a $130 million tourism and hotel project at Hamat Gader, a deal between MacDonald's and the kibbutz settlement of Merom Golan to grow potatoes for the company's french fries on 300 dunums, and at the settlement of Ortal, a $4.5 million dairy, the largest in the Middle East.[42]

50. At meetings with Golan settlers soon after his election, Prime Minister Netanyahu reiterated his commitment to increase Katzrin's population to 15,000 during his tenure. He also announced his approval of the "Golan 2000" plan presented to him before the election. The plan calls for a $202 million public sector investment in infrastructure, and new housing construction in 10 settlements, to reach the goal of increasing the plateau's Israeli population by 10,000 during the next four years.[43]

51. On 20 January 1997, construction began on 600 new units at the settlements of Hmat Ghadar, Ramot and Gamla.[44] "In fact", noted *Ma'ariv* on 30 December 1996, "we are speaking of an 'expansion plan' according to which new settlements will be established in the Golan, under the rubric of 'expanding' existing settlements".[45] Three new settlements will be established as part of the first stage of the expansion. Despite such efforts to increase the Golan settler population, by May 1996, settlement leaders were complaining that there was an "enormous gap" between settlement plans and their actual implementation.[46]

52. At the outset of a campaign to expand residential construction and to increase the settler population – part of the "Golan 2000" programme – settlement leaders reported that the settler population in the Golan is to increase by 10,000 to more than 25,000 by the year 2000.[47]

53. Settlement leader Yehuda Wolman reported that 1,600 units had been constructed in the period 1989-1996, at a rate averaging 225 units annually. He also noted that of the 14,000 Israelis residing in the Golan, 3,000 are employed by the local government council, and one third are engaged in agriculture. In 1996, agricultural production reached $240 million, while industrial production reached $100 million, tourism $40 million, sales and services $50 million, and public services $20 million. Investment in industrial production amounted to $16 million in the period 1992-1996.[48] Settlement expansion is concentrated at the settlement of Katzrin, with a current population of 7,000, the largest among 32 Golan settlements. Three hundred new units were begun in mid-1997 and formal approval from the Minister of Defence was awaited to begin construction of

an additional 1,000 units. To enable construction of the 1,000 units, the municipal area of Katzrin was expanded by 1,200 dunums bordering a nature reserve.[49]

54. For the first time since the beginning of Israeli settlement in the Golan, a private sector contractor, as opposed to government companies, undertook a residential construction project. The 300 cottages being built at Katzrin sell for $95,000 to $110,000. The State provides subsidized grants, benefits and loans comprising 90 per cent of this amount.[49] For example, beginning in October 1997, 35 building plots were marketed in the settlement of Katzrin as part of the popular "build your own house" programme. The one-half dunum plots were offered at no cost. Buyers were required to pay $10,000 towards development costs, one half the actual investment by the State. By mid-December, more than 100 prospective buyers had signed up for the 35 available lots.[50]

55. A number of incentives were adopted to attract prospective Israeli settlers into the Golan Heights, including individual grants of 50,000 shekels (equivalent to US$ 16,500) and mortgage facilities as high as 95 per cent of the value of the house, with generous repayment terms.[51] In addition, substantial state subsidies are provided in various economic sectors to strengthen the Israeli settlements policy. This includes an ongoing plan for the development of tourism in the Golan Heights, which is estimated at about US$ 5.5 million. Of that sum, $4 million is in the form of government funding. The Ministry of Tourism sponsors this project, in cooperation with the Jewish agency and the local council of settlements in the Golan.[52]

56. Employment opportunities for the Syrian Arab population in the Golan Heights are extremely restricted, since the movement of the Arab population between the Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic remains problematic with the current stalled peace process. Hence, the only employment opportunities available to the Syrian population in the Golan are limited to unskilled and semi-skilled daily wage labour. In most conditions, these workers have no access to social benefits, and health insurance and are under constant threat of being made redundant with no compensation. In addition, a substantial differential in wages prevails, to the detriment of the Syrian Arab population of the Golan.[53] Furthermore, improvement of living conditions is further aggravated owing to restrictions on expanding educational facilities, facilitation of education in the Syrian Arab Republic and access to education in Israeli colleges.[54]

57. The Arab population living in the Golan are subjected to prohibitive levels of taxation, including tax on income, health services, local councils, land and housing ownership, value added, ownership of cattle and use of water resources. Such measures have systematically deterred the Arab population from investing in agricultural or small-scale industrial development and have incited many of them to give up farming, or move to other areas and seek wage labour employment.[55]

Notes

[1] On 28 September 1995, in Washington, D.C., Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) signed the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This accord detailed the mechanisms for, and the limitation of, the extension of Palestinian self-rule to significant portions of the West Bank. The main feature of the Agreement was the provision for the division of the West Bank into three areas, each with varying degrees of Israeli and Palestinian responsibility. Area A consisted of the seven major Palestinian towns, Jenin, Kalkilya, Tulkarm, Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem and Hebron, in which Palestinians would have complete authority for civilian security. In area B, which comprised all other Palestinian population centres (except for some refugee camps), Israel would retain "overriding security responsibility". In area C, which includes all settlements, military bases and areas, and State lands, Israel would retain sole security authority.

[2] Based on the report of the Civil Administration for the West Bank, chart 8.7 (no date).

[3] Based on the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, *The Socio-Economic Impact of Israeli Settlements* (to be issued shortly).

[4] Israeli attorney Daniel Seidemann, as quoted in Foundation for Middle East Peace, *Report on Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Territories* (Washington, D.C., March 1997), p. 8.

[5] Foundation for Middle East Peace, *Report on Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Territories* (Washington, D.C., March 1998), p. 1.

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[52] *El-Quds Press*, January 1997, as quoted in "Report on Israeli practices against human rights of Syrian citizens in the occupied Syrian Golan" ..., p. 10.

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[55] Ibid., pp. 14 and 15.

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Coordination, programme and other questions: proclamation of an international year of mountains

Letter dated 26 June 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Kyrgyzstan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit the text of the Declaration of the International Seminar on the Mountains of Central Asia: Problems, Experience and Prospects, conducted at Bishkek from 25 to 28 May 1998 by the Government of Kyrgyzstan, jointly with the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development and the Asia Pacific Mountain Network within the framework of preparations for the proclamation of an international year of mountains.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the substantive session of 1998 of the Economic and Social Council, under item 7 (e) of the provisional agenda.

(*Signed*) Z. **Eshmambetova**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* E/1998/100.

98-19036 (E) 020798

Annex

Declaration of the International Seminar on the Mountains of Central Asia: Problems, Experience and Perspectives

The Seminar Participants, having considered and discussed the current situation of the mountainous areas of the Central Asian region, one of Earth's largest global mountain ecosystems, which is of major significance for the sustainable development of the entire world, note with deep concern the rapid and unfavourable geotectonic, ecological, economic, social and cultural changes taking place in the region: erosion and degradation of soils, pastures and other lands and the reduction of biodiversity; non-rational use of hydropower and mineral resources; the difficult economic situation of the population; and the increase in morbidity and mortality. The health-care situation is poor, the mountains are becoming depopulated, and ethnic and cultural skills and traditions are being lost.

The Seminar Participants, in the light of the foregoing, have decided:

1. *To recognize* the vital necessity of constantly and extensively drawing the attention of the societies and Governments of the Central Asian Republics and of the international community to the development problems facing the mountainous areas of Central Asia;

2. *To make the necessary efforts* for the collecting and exchange of information, and the creation and completion of a data bank on the ecological, economic, social, ethnic and cultural trends in the development of mountainous areas and the peoples inhabiting them; to create or facilitate the creation of regional, subregional and interregional information systems on the problems of mountainous areas; and to strengthen their ties with international organizations dealing with problems of the sustainable development of mountainous areas;

3. *To help prepare or promote* the preparation of environmental assessments of mountain systems, the establishment of legal norms and legislation, and the development of comprehensive programmes and projects for the conservation and rational use of the resources of the Central Asian region;

4. *To recognize* the timeliness and importance for the development prospects of the Central Asian region of the initiative of scientists and the Government and President of Kyrgyzstan relating to the proclamation by the United Nations in the near future of an international year of mountains since such an observance and the carrying out of related activities will undoubtedly draw political attention to the problems of mountainous areas and of mobilizing the economic, technical and financial resources of the international community for the sustainable development of those areas;

5. *To participate actively in* the activities of the proposed international year of mountains, and to formulate regional, subregional and national plans for such activities;

6. *To support* the initiative of Kyrgyz scientists for the establishment at Bishkek of a regional information centre for the study of the mountains of Central Asia, and to unite the efforts of Central Asian scientists in organizing the work of the centre;

7. *To recognize as useful* and to support the initiative of Kyrgyz scientists and the Government of Kyrgyzstan for the establishment at Bishkek of an international mountain institute, and to participate actively in its activities;

8. *To take all necessary steps* to strengthen economic and financial support for scientific research, the training of staff and the dissemination of information on the problems and tasks associated with the sustainable development of vulnerable mountain ecosystems;

9. *To recognize* the advisability of introducing the Mountain Settlement Project as the basic model for mountain settlement for the purposes of sustainable development, and to recommend the project for financing;

10. *To recommend* that Seminar materials be published in Russian and English with a view to their subsequent dissemination in the United Nations and other international organizations;

11. *To support* the initiative of the Geographical Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences to include the topic "Mountain geo-ecology and sustainable development" in the Plan of Action of the International Association of Academies of Science, and to request the academies of science of Central Asian States to consider the draft programme and submit their proposals and observations thereon to the programme initiators;

12. *To consider* the advisability of convening annual international seminars on the theme "Mountains of Central Asia: problems, experience and prospects".

Bishkek
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Utilization of the development dividend

Report of the Secretary-General

Contents

		Paragraphs	*Page*
I.	Introduction	1–7	3
II.	Networking for development	8–15	3
III.	Proposals	16–44	4
	A. Promotion of electronic commerce (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development)	16–18	4
	B. Capacity-building in economic and social policy analysis in Africa through the networking of expertise (Economic Commission for Africa)	19–21	5
	C. Extension of access of developing countries and countries with economies in transition to Mercure satellite telecommunication system for interconnectivity in environmental information and data (United Nations Environment Programme)	22–24	6
	D. Computer and telecommunications system for international and national drug control (United Nations International Drug Control Programme)	25–28	7
	E. Capacity-building and networking for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda in least developed countries (United Nations Centre for Human Settlements)	29–32	8

* E/1998/100.

98-19538 (E) 160798

F. On-line development centre (Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat) 33–36 8

G. Research network for global policy analysis (Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat) 37–40 9

H. Activities for the implementation of Agenda 21, the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat) 41–44 9

Annex

Resource requirements, by project 12

I. Introduction

1. The present report contains proposals for use of the development dividend following the establishment of the Development Account, as discussed in the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform" (A/51/950; see in particular actions 21 and 22) and further elaborated upon in the addendum thereto entitled "Creating a dividend for development" (A/51/950/Add.5).

2. The General Assembly, in paragraph 6 of its resolution 52/235, entitled "Development account", requested the Secretary-General to submit proposals on the use of the funds available under a new section 34 of the programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999, to be submitted not later than 31 July 1998 to the relevant intergovernmental bodies.

3. In accordance with that resolution, the present report has been prepared and is submitted for consideration. The report contains proposals that have been drawn up within $13.065 million appropriation to maximize their impact. They draw upon and contribute to the relevant priorities and subprogrammes established in the medium-term plan for the period 1998–2001.

4. The Programme Manager for the development account is the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, who is the Convener of the Executive Committee-Economic and Social Affairs, which comprises the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, the United Nations International Drug Control Programme, the regional commissions, the United Nations University, and the research/training institutes. The Executive Committee, *inter alia*, strengthens policy coherence and cost-effectiveness in the economic and social area. One of its main objectives is to maximize programme impact and minimize administrative costs. The Executive Committee, in its statement of objectives, expressed the need to facilitate a more effective participation of developing countries in global processes and to achieve a better balance between the global and regional dimensions of development in terms of analysis, norm setting and technical assistance. The current proposals have been formulated by individual entities comprising the Executive Committee, in the context of these broad objectives, as well as in the light of the report of the Secretary-General on utilization of the Development Account (A/52/848). These entities will also be responsible for their implementation.

5. The Agenda for Development strongly emphasizes the role of the United Nations system for revitalizing development. In a world where globalization, liberalization and interdependence have become key features of the world economy, particular attention needs to be accorded to national and international action to broaden the benefits of the process of globalization and to avoid the risk of marginalization of developing countries, in particular the least developed countries, in the world economy. For developing countries, the most important challenge is the realization of development, which, *inter alia*, calls for economic growth and favourable external conditions. This is the larger setting for the proposals contained in the present report.

6. The recommendations for the utilization of the appropriations for the development dividend for the biennium 1998–1999 are built around the concept of networking for development. This concept is mainly concerned with the way in which the United Nations can facilitate and contribute to the participation of developing countries in global and regional information networks.

7. Section II below describes the overall concept of networking for development. Section III contains a number of specific proposals formulated and agreed upon by the members of the Executive Committee for Economic and Social Affairs, which are introduced for funding by the Development Account.

II. Networking for development

8. The rationale for this approach is that full and effective participation in the emerging global information network is increasingly of fundamental importance for a country to benefit from globalization and to avoid marginalization. Information technology has made commerce, banking, entertainment, services, the assembly line, education and health care all fundamentally different today than they were only a decade ago. Today, information technology goes far beyond mass media communication, offering possibilities for change and new perspectives on development. Information technology permits rapid dissemination of ideas, values and processes, and supplements education, science, health care and culture.

9. This approach has been recently reiterated by the Commission for Social Development in its resolution 36/1, which contains agreed conclusions for attention and follow-up by the Economic and Social Council that, *inter alia*, indicated that information is not only a commodity. Access

to information is essential for full participation in all spheres of life, including the global economy. Policies should be formulated to promote new, cost-effective, inclusive and participatory approaches in the production, dissemination and use of information. To avoid the widening of the gap between the information-rich and the information-poor, particularly the gap between developed and developing countries, strategies must be developed to prioritize and promote adequate investment, including access to technology in order to provide equal opportunity for all. In this context, measures should be taken to promote access by developing countries to the new information superhighway.

10. Information flows – and consequently information technology – have been and are a major engine of globalization. However, many developing countries are still at the margin of the global economy, and will be unable to participate in it positively without a significant enhancement of their ability to connect to major international information networks. Furthermore, developing countries' data requirements for economic, social and environmental policy management, including monitoring and implementation of national and regional programmes, as well as requirements emanating from the recently held United Nations global conferences, are exceptionally high.

11. Providing information technology presents a low-cost solution for the better integration of developing countries in the world economy, where timely information plays a vital role. Information technology contributes to a better integration of developing countries in the world economy, and it creates the conditions in which exchanges of experiences and best practices within and among developing countries, as well as between developed and developing countries, can take place. Effective country-level follow-up of recent United Nations global conferences calls for institutional capacities to integrate economic, social and environmental aspects in development decision-making. Improved access to modern information technology will facilitate such integration.

12. Information technology sets the stage for increasingly indispensable networking, not only among policy makers in developing countries but also among research institutions in these countries. Furthermore, information technology will make it possible to have such networking encompass linkages to the world at large, including the United Nations policy analysis capabilities and its research institutes.

13. The networking of experts must have a clear purpose. The many recommendations of the cycle of United Nations conferences on capacity-building can provide this focus. The efforts that are being made at the country level and that are supported by the United Nations funds, programmes and agencies, *inter alia*, can be strengthened by more effective arrangements for exchange of knowledge, experience and ideas between countries.

14. In his reform proposal, the Secretary-General announced his intentions of increasing the use of information technology and strengthening South-South cooperation. Focusing the utilization of the development dividend on information technology and networking for development should be an important contributor to this goal.

15. The eight current proposals are set out below.

III. Proposals

A. Promotion of electronic commerce (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development)

Objectives

16. The objectives proposed are to enhance the awareness of decision makers and negotiators from developing countries and countries in transition about the nature and issues related to electronic commerce, and to assist them in eliminating some of the obstacles to participating in electronic commerce, including gaining access to physical networks, resources and technology.

Justification

17. Electronic commerce is attracting attention in multilateral discussions due to its potential impact on international trade and development. It offers excellent opportunities to trade at lower cost through the elimination of intermediation and participation in global markets. Currently, these opportunities have not been fully identified and taken advantage of by developing countries and countries in transition due to information gaps, high cost and lack of external support in the start-up stages. The United Nations system can play a catalytic role by providing information, equipment and the networking capabilities through a strengthening of the Global Trade Point Network operated by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

Proposed activities

18. The following activities are proposed:

(a) Development and maintenance of information exchange and policy analysis schemes, particularly for

government officials in developing countries and countries in transition, on (i) the impact of current proposals made in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the World Trade Organization and elsewhere for a global framework for electronic commerce, and (ii) the nature and implications of potential internationally agreed commitments/standards in the area of trade facilitation and electronic commerce concerning government policies on the different sectors involved in issues related to electronic commerce;

(b) Analyses of the effects of internationally adopted documentary standards and business practices for electronic commerce (at both government and industry levels) on businesses in developing countries and countries in transition;

(c) Two high-level expert meetings to discuss the conclusions and recommendations of the above studies;

(d) Expert assistance and advice provided to the Governments on policy issues relating to trade facilitation and electronic commerce;

(e) Two round-table conferences on electronic commerce, bringing together Governments, private sector and civil society;

(f) Development of tailor-made software tools (such as a database management system for electronic trading opportunities from the Global Trade Point Network, software for a "paperless" small and medium enterprises (SMEs) office, and for a secure transmission of messages for SMEs), and their dissemination through the worldwide network of Trade Points, and the GTPNet Web site;

(g) Preparation of computer-assisted training courses for SMEs in developing countries and countries in transition on (i) export and import practices in the age of electronic commerce, (ii) international payments in electronic commerce, (iii) freight forwarding and electronic commerce, and (iv) international marketing, with a particular focus on the use of the Internet;

(h) Organization of a training-of-trainers course (see above) for participants from 10 pilot countries;

(i) Consultancy to Trade Points on the setting up and marketing of electronic commerce services for their SME clients;

(j) Enrichment of the GTPNet Web site through user-friendly design, as well as relevant information and the development of interactive features improving communication with clients;

(k) Publishing and dissemination of information about electronic commerce, with a focus on issues of relevance for developing countries and countries in transition.

B. Capacity-building in economic and social policy analysis in Africa through the networking of expertise (Economic Commission for Africa)

Objectives

19. Objectives proposed are to reinforce development expertise on Africa by building professional relationships and support networks with and among research centres and individual experts in and outside Africa with a view to enhancing analytical and applied skills in support of policy-making. In the implementation of the proposal, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) will mainly play the role of facilitator and catalyst. It is envisaged that member States, ECA and network partners would benefit from effective networking of development expertise on Africa, and that ECA would serve as a clearing house for best practices and a source of African development information.

Justification

20. Besides ECA, which has the responsibility to advise Governments on urgent national and regional policy issues, other institutions and independent researchers in and outside Africa also undertake research activities relevant to the African policy environment. Linking these institutions and providing results of their policy analysis more directly to decision makers would add value to and increase the policy impact of their work in the continent. The proposal will enable ECA to tap network-affiliated expertise in a cost-effective way to amass critical talent on behalf of the region, and to make available to member States relevant advice in a timely manner. By teaming up with ECA, the networks and their affiliated policy researchers would enjoy the benefit of having a more direct impact on policy outcomes in ECA member States.

Proposed activities

21. The following activities are proposed:

(a) Undertaking studies of common national policy issues, such as trade and exchange regimes, structural adjustment policies and private-sector promotion policies;

(b) Undertaking analysis of subregional problems, such as economic integration, transportation and standardization issues, water and natural resources management;

(c) Conducting studies on Africa-wide issues and issues facing Africa, versus the rest of the world, such as global environmental topics, international trade, monetary arrangements and external debt negotiations;

(d) Strengthening communications infrastructure through electronic connectivity with the target network institutions;

(e) Setting up a network partners forum as an annual event;

(f) Setting up a visiting scholars' programme at ECA to increase the pool of professionals with hands-on experience in policy analysis and operations;

(g) Setting up an internship programme for young African professionals to familiarize them with and contribute to the research and policy operations of ECA, networks and member States, and to prepare these young people for possible career assignments to network organizations and member States' Governments;

(h) Implementing a staff exchange between research institutions to pool expertise for its maximum usage in the region;

(i) Building and sharing common databases in the networks to increase the availability, quality and accessibility of basic research inputs;

(j) Building research methodology expertise in the networks, a special capacity-building investment for future high-quality policy research;

(k) Planning and implementing resource mobilization and other activities necessary to ensure the sustainability of network programmes beyond the project phase;

(l) Setting up a dedicated project implementation, administration, monitoring and reporting infrastructure, particularly to support the Joint Research Steering Committee, which it is proposed should direct the professional aspects of the project.

C. Extension of access of developing countries and countries with economies in transition to Mercure satellite telecommunication system for interconnectivity in environmental information and data (United Nations Environment Programme)

Objectives

22. Objectives proposed are to improve the access of Governments to information and data for decision-making for sustainable development, and to enhance their ability to play an active role in better environmental and natural resources management within the frameworks of global and regional cooperation. The implementation of the proposal will result in the provision to selected developing countries and countries with economies in transition of the basic Mercure satellite telecommunication earth stations and the associated local area network capacity (optional) with a view to strengthening their capabilities to access and exchange environmental and sustainable development information and data.

Justification

23. In November 1997, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) launched the Mercure satellite telecommunication system, thanks to a donation from six European countries. The system is intended to provide a high-speed satellite telecommunication capability for environmental information and data exchange. Currently, 16 countries have operational earth stations under the Mercure system. For decision makers in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, the absence of access to high-speed telecommunication system is a serious obstacle to obtaining internationally available information and data. Even for countries that have connectivity on the Internet, access at very high costs is a serious impediment.

Activities

24. The following activities are proposed:

(a) Provision of Mercure earth stations (type B specification) and associated equipment;

(b) Provision of a small-scale local area network system (optional);

(c) Provision of training for earth station managers and associated computer network officers;

(d) Provision of follow-up operation and maintenance services (recurrent);

(e) Provision of technical assistance for using the Mercure system to access environmental information and data to facilitate environmental planning and management (recurrent);

(f) Support to the global Mercure system (satellite transponder).

D. Computer and telecommunication system for international and national drug control (United Nations International Drug Control Programme)

Objectives

25. Objectives proposed are to facilitate national monitoring and management of production, manufacture, consumption, stocks and confiscation of seizures of substances and preparations containing narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals. The proposal is aimed at offering member States a comprehensive system supporting data collection, analysis and other aspects of international and national drug control, while reducing the burden on Governments for manual data-gathering, maintenance and exchange. It will be achieved through expanding to more countries the distribution, installation and training of the Computer and Telecommunication System for International and National Drug Control, as well as adding new modules covering additional aspects of demand reduction, such as the international drug abuse assessment system, and modules on supply reduction, illicit trafficking and law enforcement intelligence activities.

Justification

26. The production, manufacture of and trade in psychoactive drugs and the chemicals needed for their illicit manufacture should be controlled nationally and internationally. The purpose of control is to prevent diversion of substance into illicit channels, and to ensure that countries obtain the quantities that they need for medical, scientific and other licit purposes. Monitoring and managing movements of controlled substances is a complex process because it involves numerous partners. Information needs to be exchanged between commercial companies, national drug control administrations, customs officials and the secretariat of the International Narcotics Control Board. To facilitate the process, a computer-based system, the Computer and Telecommunication System for International and National Drug Control, has been designed and is available to strengthen the management and control of licit movements of psychoactive drugs and precursor chemicals, and to enhance timeliness of information exchange at the national and international levels. The system primarily enables national administrations to keep track of all individual transactions in a computerized database. It handles issuance of import-export authorizations, certificates and pre-notifications with respect to international licit trade. The System has been developed in three separate phases. After collecting requirements from Governments during 1990–1994, the first phase was the actual development and test of the software package (1995–1996). The second phase covered implementation of the system in 25 countries (1997–1998). The third phase, covered under the present proposal, involves the application of the system in more countries, particularly developing countries, and its further substantive development.

Duration

27. The following duration is proposed: 1998–2001.

Activities

28. The following activities are proposed:

(a) Multiple installation of the specifically developed software to enhance the capacity to access, develop and utilize knowledge for the formulation of prevention and control policies, both nationally and internationally;

(b) Establishing means for data-secure information exchange among partners in international drug control, such as national health authorities, national law enforcement authorities, drug control councils, regional bodies etc., ensuring that national sovereignty and domestic data-protection regulations are fully met;

(c) Promoting, through advanced technology, easy and economic information exchange, international and national cooperation, and elaborate upon information collection methodologies and standards for greater application worldwide.

E. Capacity-building and networking for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda in least developed countries (United Nations Centre for Human Settlements)

Objectives

29. Objectives proposed are to strengthen the capacity of national committees and mechanisms, particularly in least developed countries, to collect, analyse and apply knowledge, information and expertise to policy development and decision-making processes in support of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and of urban-related elements and chapter 40 of Agenda 21. This will be achieved through the enhanced capacity of key groups of actors to collect, analyse, exchange and apply data and information on urban indicators as an objective means of monitoring trends and conditions, identifying priorities, and assessing the impact of policies and practices (that is, identifying best practices as a means of learning from successful initiatives in improving the living environment and assessing implications for policy change, and identifying good policies; most notably examples of enabling legislation in support of urban development, decentralization/governance and housing).

Justification

30. The implementation of the Habitat Agenda is primarily the responsibility of Governments. International cooperation plays a supporting role in this process, particularly through networking, capacity-building and information exchange and dissemination. The Habitat Agenda calls for Governments to further strengthen and/or establish broad-based participatory national committees. Many countries have now established institutional mechanisms for the implementation of and follow-up to the Habitat Agenda. For some of these countries, the next step in the process is the designation and/or establishment of national and local urban observatories to collect, analyse and apply data and information on current human settlement policies, strategies, trends and conditions as a basis for the policy and decision-making processes.

Duration

31. The following duration is proposed: 1998–1999.

Activities

32. The following activities are proposed:

(a) Development and testing of training aids and methodological tools for the collection, analysis and application of urban indicators, best practices and good policies for the monitoring and implementation of national and local plans of action;

(b) Compilation of selected sets of indicators, best practices and legislation, and their analysis in terms of lessons learned;

(c) Organization of four subregional training and transfer workshops: two in Africa, one in Latin America and one in Asia; these workshops are to be preceded by three regional Internet conferences to assess and match supply with demand for expertise and experience. The workshops will result in the exposure of 120 representatives of national and local government, civic and community leaders, parliamentarians and practising professionals to the application of urban indicators, as well as lessons learned from best practices and examples of enabling policies and legislation;

(d) Organization of an interregional meeting of partners for refining training aids and methodological tools for their continued use and development on-line, and implementation of an on-line classroom. The on-line classroom will enable partners and national committees to continuously benefit from methodological, substantive and normative inputs from global monitoring and implementation activities, as well as to exchange experience and learn from each other.

F. On-line development centre (Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat)

Objectives

33. Objectives proposed are to provide an Internet-based on-line development centre – an on-line, low-cost centre for information on and discussion of development issues – with a view to supporting extensive South-South dialogue, sharing and communication.

Justification

34. The implementation of the recommendations of recent United Nations global conferences would be considerably enhanced through the establishment of a central capacity to facilitate information exchange. The proposed centre would save on transportation costs by setting up virtual facilities for drafting and negotiating reports and other documents,

conducting workshops and seminars, and accessing information on technical cooperation experts and individuals and institutions working in development fields via the Internet.

Duration

35. The following duration is proposed: 1998–1999.

Activities

36. The following activities are proposed:

(a) Set up an on-line development centre and a network of subregional service centres;

(b) Set up on-line meeting and training facilities and a virtual library, with multilingual support;

(c) Create an on-line searchable directory (e.g., by name, language, country, field of interest) to facilitate contacting individuals, non-governmental organizations, and government officials working throughout the world on development issues through the Internet.

G. Research network for global policy analysis (Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat)

Objectives

37. Objectives proposed are to enhance the ability of economic analysts and decision makers in developing countries, especially in least developed countries, to analyse and forecast the macroeconomic performance of such countries and to increase the scope and depth of policy analyses on the global economy, particularly the developing economies, that the United Nations Secretariat provides in background reports to the Council and the General Assembly.

Justification

38. The role of the external economic environment is growing in developing countries, and the ability of these countries to sustain growth will depend increasingly on their capacity to analyse current trends in their own and the global economy, and to anticipate possible changes in these trends in order to formulate and implement appropriate policy measures. Many developing countries, especially least developed countries, lack well-trained economic analysts who can provide their decision makers with sufficiently detailed and timely analyses and forecasts. The United Nations Secretariat can help to provide such training and experience through the international macroeconomic research network maintained by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs Project LINK. The project aims to increase the involvement of developing country research institutions in Project Link and other mechanisms for global policy analysis, including studies on emerging issues and critical trends in economic, social and environmental fields.

Duration

39. The following duration is proposed: 1999–2000.

Proposed activities

40. The following activities are proposed:

(a) Train researchers from developing countries in advanced techniques of macroeconomic analysis, particularly through networking arrangements;

(b) Upgrade economic and social databases in developing countries and improve access of their research institutions to global databases;

(c) Enhance the capacity of developing country institutions for the implementation of development strategies through strengthening of their ability to monitor national and international macroeconomic trends;

(d) Facilitate the participation of developing country experts in workshops and seminars on macroeconomic policy modelling and forecasting, including Project LINK and other established activities on global policy analysis undertaken by the United Nations.

H. Activities for the implementation of Agenda 21, the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat)

Objectives

41. Objectives proposed are to strengthen the capacity of national and local mechanisms, particularly in least developed countries, to collect, analyse and apply knowledge, information and expertise to policy development, with emphasis on the preparation of national

sustainable development strategies, decision-making and national information processes in support of the implementation of chapters 8 and 40 of Agenda 21; to advise on programme design, to monitor progress and evaluate effectiveness of programmes and projects in support of the goals of the World Summit for Social Development, and to advise on strengthening of national machinery for the advancement of women, women and new technologies, and the increased role of women in leadership and public life, as recommended in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. This will be achieved through the enhanced capacity of key groups of actors to collect, analyse, exchange and apply data and information, identifying priorities and assessing the impact of policies and practices, and through exchanges of best practices as a means of learning from successful initiatives and assessing implications for policy change and enabling legislation. Such actions will lead to the further development of guidelines, experience and best practices in the preparation of national strategies for and the dissemination of such guidelines and related information to assist countries in their implementation of commitments made at these global conferences.

Justification

42. The promotion of the implementation of Agenda 21, the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action are priorities of the approved medium-term plan for the period 1998–2001. Policy development, networking, capacity-building, and information exchange and dissemination are essential for the implementation of these programmes. Agenda 21 calls for Governments to prepare national sustainable development strategies, programmes for monitoring their implementation, improving information for decision-making, establishing national councils for sustainable development, and promoting greater participation of civil society groups. The Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action of the Summit invite Governments to further strengthen and/or establish broad-based participatory national and local mechanisms for implementation and follow-up based on partnerships of Governments (including local government), non-governmental organizations, citizen and professional groups, and the private sector. The Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action urge Governments to establish or strengthen appropriate national machineries for the advancement of women and to broaden women's participation and integrate gender analysis into policies and programmes. A number of countries require further support in their efforts to fully integrate the commitments made at these global conferences into decision-making and in improving related information systems for decision-making.

Duration

43. The following duration is proposed: 1998–1999.

Activities

44. The following activities are proposed:

(a) Organization of up to 10 regional consultative meetings to exchange national experience and information on the development and use of national approaches/strategies for and national experience in implementing Agenda 21, the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action;

(b) Provision of advisory support service to assist least developed countries, as requested, in the preparation of national sustainable development strategies;

(c) Continued support and methodological development of the core list of indicators of sustainable development, in close cooperation with the 22 testing countries, and capacity-building in those countries for fully implementing the indicators programme;

(d) Organization and conduct of regional and subregional workshops in support of capacity-building efforts on indicators of sustainable development, particularly to assist countries in incorporating modern information systems and techniques into national decision-making processes;

(e) Provision of assistance to developing countries in the area of indicators of sustainable development, through regional and subregional expert consultations to address technical issues and problems, identify solutions, and overcome bottlenecks and trouble spots;

(f) Development of prototype mechanisms appropriate for national and local conditions to strengthen participatory programme designs, monitoring and evaluation;

(g) Preparation of guidelines and manuals for the use of conveners and participants in national and local mechanisms regarding the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development;

(h) Preparation of manuals and information material on participatory social assessment techniques;

(i) Organization of six expert group meetings (of 20 participants each) to exchange experience regarding the

monitoring of and reporting on national efforts to implement the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, and identification of obstacles to effective implementation and monitoring of progress;

(j) Organization of three interregional workshops for strengthening national machineries for the advancement of women to exchange experiences on efforts to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, with emphasis on women's role in decision-making;

(k) Organization of five Internet conferences on implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action to enable women's non-governmental organizations, particularly in developing countries, to share experiences and best practices, and to contribute to the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action scheduled for June 2000.

Annex

Resource requirements, by project

(United States dollars)

Project title	*Amount*
Promotion of electronic commerce (UNCTAD)	1 980 000
Capacity-building in economic and social policy analysis in Africa through the networking of expertise (ECA)	2 500 000
Extension of access of developing countries and countries with economies in transition to Mercure satellite telecommunication system for interconnectivity in environmental information and data (UNEP)	2 215 000
Computer and telecommunication system for international and national drug control (UNDCP)	1 100 000
Capacity-building and networking for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda in least developed countries (Habitat)	945 000
On-line development centre (Department of Economic and Social Affairs)	510 000
Research network for global policy analysis (Department of Economic and Social Affairs)	725 000
Activities for the implementation of Agenda 21, the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Department of Economic and Social Affairs)	2 330 000
Total	12 305 000

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New York, 6-31 July 1998
Agenda item 1
Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters

Requests from non-governmental organizations for hearings

Report of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations

1. The Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, acting in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31, had before it at its 676th meeting on 26 June 1998, requests from non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council for hearings by the Council in connection with items in the Council's agenda for its substantive session of 1998.

2. The Committee decided to recommend that the organizations listed below be heard under the agenda items indicated:

International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres

Item 6. Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits.

Item 12. Non-governmental organizations.

Item 13. Economic and environmental questions:

(a) Sustainable development.

Item 14. Social and human rights questions:

(b) Social development.

98-19191 (E) 020798

International Movement ATD Fourth World

Item 4. Coordination of the policies and activities of the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system related to the following theme: Coordinated follow-up to and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

Item 14. Social and human rights questions:

(b) Social development.

International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations

Item 11. Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan.

Item 12. Non-governmental organizations.

Item 13. Economic and environmental questions:

(a) Sustainable development.

Item 14. Social and human rights questions:

(b) Social development;

(f) Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination;

(g) Human rights.

Inter-Parliamentary Union

Item 4. Coordination of the policies and activities of the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system related to the following theme: Coordinated follow-up to and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

Item 14. Social and human rights questions:

(a) Advancement of women;

(g) Human rights.

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Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters

Requests from non-governmental organizations for hearings

Addendum

1. The following requests for hearings by non-governmental organizations were received by the Bureau of the Council after the meeting of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations (see E/1998/82).

2. The Council is requested to decide upon the requests for hearings by the organizations listed below under the agenda items indicated:

Human Rights Watch

Item 4 Coordination of the policies and activities of the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system related to the following theme: Coordinated follow-up to and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

International Confederation of Free Trade Unions

Item 7 Coordination, programme and other questions.

Item 14 Social and human rights questions:

(b) Social development.

98-19462 (E) 080798

International Multiracial Shared Cultural Organization

Item 13 Economic and environmental questions:

(a) Sustainable development.

World Federation of Trade Unions

Item 13 Economic and environmental questions:

(a) Sustainable development.

Item 14 Social and human rights questions:

(b) Social development.

follow-up to and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies

Item 14. Social and human rights questions:

(b) Social development.

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Item 7 of the provisional agenda*
Coordination, programme and other questions

Letter dated 30 June 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

I have the honour to convey the proposal of my Government that the year 2005 be proclaimed by the United Nations as the International Year of Microcredit. It is the final year of the Microcredit Summit campaign, launched in February 1997, which seeks to reach 100 million of the world's poorest families, especially the women of those families, with credit for self-employment and other financial and business services by the year 2005.

An explanatory memorandum in support of the above proposal is annexed to the present letter.

I would like to request you to have this letter and its annex circulated as an official document of the substantive session of 1998 of the Economic and Social Council, under agenda item 7 of the provisional agenda.

(*Signed*) Anwarul Karim **Chowdhury**

* E/1998/100

98-19351 (E) 070798

Annex

International Year of Microcredit, 2005

It has been proposed that the year 2005 be proclaimed by the United Nations as the International Year of Microcredit. It is the final year of the Microcredit Summit campaign, which seeks to reach 100 million of the world's poorest families, especially the women of those families, with credit for self-employment and other financial and business services by the year 2005.

This global movement was launched at the Microcredit Summit, held in Washington, D.C., from 2 to 4 February 1997, by Heads of State and Government and their representatives from all regions of the world and by the 2,900 participants from 137 countries consisting of governmental representatives, representatives of international financial institutions, various United Nations agencies, members of non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and grass-roots-level practitioners and advocates of microcredit.

The Microcredit Summit was conceived as part of a larger global effort to eradicate poverty. To be successful, the overall movement to end poverty will require the implementation of a broad range of strategies. One of the strategies is building institutions capable of providing microcredit services – specifically, credit for self-employment and savings capabilities – to 100 million of the world's poorest families. For its implementation, the civil society, national Governments, the international community and regional and international organizations, including international financial institutions, will be required to play their part. Observance of the international year will contribute to the dissemination of knowledge, building of partnerships, and broadening of the understanding of individual as well as shared roles in pursuit of the common goal launched at the Summit.

Microcredit programme use methodologies that promote responsibility, self-esteem and financial self-sufficiency by capturing the capacity of communities to solve their own problems. It is a key strategy in achieving many of the goals agreed at the major global conferences of this decade, including eradication of poverty and empowerment of women.

The target of this non-traditional lending strategy is to make commercial credit available to low-income people, mostly women, who would not normally be eligible for these loans. Programmes using best practices identified by practitioners in the field have achieved excellent repayment rates and played an important role in helping low-income people to become self-sufficient, while at the same time achieving development in the communities they live in.

Micro-lending has grown over the past decade from being an anti-poverty strategy primarily used in developing countries to one of achieving social development. Increasing numbers of countries, both developing and developed, are deriving benefit from successful microcredit schemes. In addition to its impact on the eradication of poverty, microcredit has had other favourable social impacts, establishing social justice and increasing borrowers' participation in political and social activities. Those with access to microcredit have been found to enjoy better health and education and desirable family size compared to other people living in poverty without access to credit.

Following the Microcredit Summit, all major summit meetings and high-level international political forums have expressed positive support to microcredit. They include the Twelfth Ministerial Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement (New Delhi, 4-8 April 1997), the ninth meeting of the Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Male, 12-14 May 1997), the Organization of African Unity (Harare, 2-4 June 1997), the Group of Seven

statement on economic and financial issues (Denver, Colorado, 21 June 1997), the substantive session of 1997 of the Economic and Social Council (Geneva, 30 June-25 July 1997), Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (Edinburgh, 24-27 October 1997), and the Thirteenth Ministerial Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement (Cartagena, 18-20 May 1998).

The awareness and recognition among Member States of this approach is growing fast. Many have already adopted appropriate microcredit schemes in their overall approaches to socio-economic development. Many more are actively considering incorporation of a microcredit strategy in their overall approach to combating poverty and achieving social development. General Assembly resolution 52/194, of 18 December 1997, entitled "Role of microcredit in the eradication of poverty", presents the overall approach and the viewpoint of the Member States on microcredit. The United Nations system, including the international financial institutions, and regional banks have substantially increased their support and expanded Microcredit programmes since the adoption of the resolution.

Designation of the international year will reinforce the efforts already being undertaken at different levels and strengthen the follow-up activities needed to implement the vision arrived at at the Microcredit Summit. This will also contribute, through stimulation of national, regional and international activities, to the raising of awareness of the socially beneficial role of microcredit.

The observance will also highlight 2005 as a special occasion for giving further impetus to reaching the goals and objectives of the Microcredit Summit and to making microcredit available to people who are willing and able to undertake microenterprises, based on voluntary commitment of individuals, foundations, and other organizations to make available their resources and skills in the interest of the less advantaged.

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Agenda item 14 (g)
Social and human rights questions: Human rights questions

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction	1	2
II.	Fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights	2–8	2
III.	Fifty-fourth session of the Commission on Human Rights	9–18	3
	A. Special dialogue on gender and the human rights of women	16–18	4
IV.	Promoting human rights through technical cooperation	19–29	4
	A. Framework for regional technical cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region	19	4
	B. Framework strategy for the promotion of human rights in Africa	20–25	4
	C. Technical cooperation activities in Latin America and the Caribbean	26–28	5
	D. National institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights	29	6
V.	Mainstreaming human rights	30–31	6
VI.	Conclusion	32	6

98-20237 (E) 210798

I. Introduction

1. This report is submitted to the Economic and Social Council pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/141 by which the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was established. In February 1998 a comprehensive first report (E/CN.4/1998/122) was submitted by the High Commissioner to the Commission on Human Rights. It is being made available to the Council as well. The present report seeks to provide an overview of developments that have taken place since the report to the Commission, taking into account information now before the Council in other documents.

II. Fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

2. The fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights[1] has allowed the international community to reflect on the achievements and shortcomings of the past 50 years in its efforts to promote and protect human rights. And it has provided an opportunity for advancing human rights through concrete actions. The motto of the fiftieth anniversary, "All human rights for all", not only reinforces the vision of the Universal Declaration but also highlights the need for a reinvigorated commitment to working for a better balance between the protection and promotion of the whole range of human rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural – and advancing the right to development.

3. The United Nations system has undertaken many commemorative activities through its principal bodies dealing with human rights, the specialized agencies and various United Nations programmes. Some activities have already taken place, while others are planned for the period leading up to 10 December.

4. As part of the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary, the High Commissioner organized, in cooperation with United Nations agencies and programmes, a forum titled Dialogue on Mainstreaming Human Rights in the United Nations. It took place on 16 March 1998 after the first meeting of the Commission on Human Rights. The forum, moderated by the Secretary-General, was attended by heads and senior officials of United Nations agencies and programmes. It focused on the steps that have been taken, and those envisaged, to place human rights on the agenda of the United Nations systemwide. Other events and activities during the session of the Commission included a round table of experts on benchmarks for the implementation of economic, social and cultural rights; a panel on racial discrimination; and exhibitions and cultural events sponsored by several member States.

5. The General Assembly is scheduled to hold a special plenary meeting on 10 December 1998 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration. During that meeting the 1998 Human Rights Prizes will be presented to those individuals or organizations that have made significant contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights.

6. The fiftieth anniversary programme of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner is being implemented in cooperation with partners within the United Nations and outside the system. To disseminate the message of the Universal Declaration as widely as possible, the Office has implemented an education and information campaign in close cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat. The campaign has focused on disseminating the Universal Declaration through a variety of information channels, including special publications, posters and information kits. As a contribution to the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995–2004), Ministers of Education have been provided with resource materials to help schools give human rights education a special focus during 1998.

7. A major public information project, carried out with the assistance of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), is making accessible on the website of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner (www.unhchr.ch) language versions of the Universal Declaration; some 75 are already available, and the target is to have 250 available by October 1998. The website also features a comprehensive survey of fiftieth anniversary activities being carried out by Governments, United Nations agencies and programmes, and civil society. During the anniversary year the Office is also launching a programme designed to reach people at the community level. The Human Rights ACT Project (Assisting Communities Together) will provide a limited number of small grants to local organizations and individuals planning human rights activities in their communities. The Project is being implemented in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS).

8. The commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary is leading to a better and richer understanding of the Universal

Declaration as a living expression of the dignity of all human beings. One activity in this respect is the preparation of Islamic commentaries and perspectives on the Universal Declaration. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in his statement to the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-fourth session, requested the High Commissioner to invite commentaries on the Universal Declaration, and the High Commissioner agreed to do so because of the great potential for promoting understanding and respect among peoples. A key part in this process will be a seminar of experts in Islamic law scheduled for November 1998. The High Commissioner is working closely with the Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in the preparation of the commentaries and perspectives.

III. Fifty-fourth session of the Commission on Human Rights

9. The Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-fourth session demonstrated the importance States Members of the United Nations attach to human rights and the role played by the Commission itself as a unique worldwide forum for human rights, bringing together Governments, international organizations and the non-governmental community to give public consideration to issues of crucial importance to humanity. The Commission was opened by the Secretary-General and was addressed by the President of the Czech Republic. The Prime Minister of France and ministerial-level representatives from some 60 countries also made statements during the session.

10. The Commission decided to recommend to the General Assembly that it approve a draft declaration on the right and responsibility of individuals, groups and organs of society to promote and protect universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms. The importance of such a declaration and, more importantly, its implementation, were underscored by the assassination during the session of the Colombian human rights activist José Eduardo Uman Mendoza. The Commission observed a minute of silence in his memory on 20 April 1998. The adoption of the draft declaration by the General Assembly would be an important step towards promoting human rights during the anniversary year of the Universal Declaration. In its preamble, the Universal Declaration urges "every individual and every organ of society" to promote respect for the rights set forth in it and to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance.

11. The Commission sharpened its focus on the intolerable living conditions of large sectors of humanity and the serious and grave violations of basic economic, social and cultural human rights those conditions entail. It called attention to the 800 million individuals who do not have enough food for basic nutritional needs, and called for technical and financial efforts to be mobilized in response and for the right to food to be more clearly defined. It decided to establish a follow-up mechanism on the right to development, with an independent expert charged with studying the current state of progress in realizing that right. The Commission further decided to appoint an independent expert on extreme poverty, name a special rapporteur on the right to education, establish a working group on the right to development, and extend the mandate of the working group on the effects of structural adjustment policies on the full enjoyment of human rights. These steps will help to raise the understanding of economic, social and cultural rights to the level of that of civil and political rights and increase the impact of implementation activities.

12. The Commission also made progress in relation to indigenous populations and in preparation for the World Conference on Racism.

13. The Commission took an important step forward by deciding to reform its agenda. It launched a thorough review of its mechanisms and charged its Bureau with making recommendations to it at its next session. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner is also engaged in collecting and analysing information on the reform of the United Nations human rights machinery, pursuant to the High Commissioner's mandate and the reform programme of the Secretary-General.

14. The Commission expressed concern with the resources currently available from the regular United Nations budget for the human rights programme and appealed for sufficient regular resources.

15. The Commission devoted significant attention to reports of violations of human rights in all parts of the world. The information presented showed the extreme seriousness of many situations, the need for energetic cooperative action by the States concerned, and the difficulty of having States adopt the needed measures.

A. Special dialogue on gender and the human rights of women

16. The Commission on Human Rights held a special interactive dialogue on gender and the human rights of women during its fifty-fourth session, with the participation of the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women, the High Commissioner, the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, governments and non-governmental organizations.

17. The dialogue was aimed at bringing closer together the work of the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on the Status of Women, which, at its most recent session (2–13 March 1998),[2] and in connection with the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration, had focused its attention on areas of the Beijing Platform for Action[3] directly relevant to human rights: the human rights of women; the girl child; women and armed conflict; violence against women; and women's enjoyment of economic and social rights. It was felt that the results of the discussions held by the Commission on the Status of Women could strengthen the work of the Commission on Human Rights in the areas of gender and the human rights of women and in relation to crucial economic and social rights aspects of the right to development. In addition, the Commission on Human Rights would have its own substantive perspective to contribute to the work of the Commission on the Status of Women.

18. The wide ranging discussion, with questions from Governments and non-governmental organizations, covered such issues as female genital mutilation; violence against women; women's economic, social and cultural rights; and ways and means of improving United Nations actions protecting the human rights of women. The question of the inclusion of violence against women in the statute of the proposed International Criminal Court was raised. The objective of improving the representation of women in the Secretariat and in United Nations bodies was also discussed. The inclusion on the Commission's agenda of a separate item on the human rights of women, on the understanding that the issue would also be relevant to the other agenda items, was suggested. At the end of its session, the Commission decided to include on the provisional agenda for its fifty-fifth session an item on integration of the human rights of women and a gender perspective.

IV. Promoting human rights through technical cooperation

A. Framework for regional technical cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region

19. Promoting respect for human rights through national capacity-building is one of the most important objectives set by the Vienna Declaration[4] for the human rights programme. Progress is being made in a number of areas. In early March 1998 the 36 States participating in the Tehran Workshop on Regional Arrangements for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in the Asia-Pacific Region adopted a framework for regional technical cooperation in that region. The framework contains four areas of technical cooperation and specific objectives, as follows:

(a) National plans of action for the promotion and protection of human rights and the strengthening of national capacities;

(b) Human rights education;

(c) National institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights;

(d) Strategies for the realization of the rights to development and economic, social and cultural rights.

Specific budget estimates were foreseen, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner was designated as the implementing agency in response to requests from Governments. States will be able to assess progress in annual meetings on the basis of a report by the Secretariat.

B. Framework strategy for the promotion of human rights in Africa

20. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has developed a framework strategy to support human rights projects in Africa within the context of the United Nations system-wide activities to promote development in Africa. The framework strategy, which aims at improving the enjoyment of all human rights for all in Africa, has three principal components: assisting States in adopting and implementing national human rights action plans; assisting the Organization of African Unity and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to strengthen their activities in the field of human rights; and strengthening non-governmental and grass-roots organizations and civil society in promoting respect for human rights. These activities will be carried out in response

to the requests of the States and organizations concerned and in the context of the specific characteristics of each situation.

21. UNDP was consulted in the preparation of the strategy and has expressed its support for it and its willingness to collaborate in its implementation. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has welcomed the framework strategy which coincides with the objectives of the Mauritius Plan of Action adopted by the African Commission in October 1996. The Commission on Human Rights proposed that discussions begin as soon as possible on concrete steps towards implementation.

22. The High Commissioner, pursuant to component one of the Mauritius Plan, has written to each Government in Africa to encourage the adoption of a national plan, where one has not already been adopted, and to offer support in implementing plans where they already exist. In this context, the High Commissioner signed, on 28 April 1998, a Memorandum of Intention with the Government of Morocco for the creation of a centre for human rights documentation and training, within the framework of the development of a national plan of action.

23. Further, the High Commissioner, after consultations with UNDP, decided to assign a regional human rights resource person for southern Africa, charged with facilitating, in coordination and consultation with the UNDP resident representatives, the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of projects for human rights, democracy and the rule of law, developed at governmental request. Advice would also be provided, as requested, to Governments of the region and to the secretariat of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The High Commissioner met with senior officials of SADAC in Gabaronne to discuss responding to their needs in the field of human rights. The resource person is based in the UNDP Office in Johannesburg.

24. Under component two of the Mauritius Plan, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner agreed to assist in the preparation of the OAU Ministerial Conference on Human and Peoples' Rights in Africa, scheduled for October 1998 in Luanda, Angola. The assistance will be in the form of substantive background documents and support for pre-conference meetings of national institutions and non-governmental organizations. In addition, the High Commissioner has initiated discussions with the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity on closer cooperation in the field of human rights.

25. In connection with component three (strengthening non-governmental organizations), a meeting was organized by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner during the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on Human Rights with African non-governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations involved in Africa, to help determine their needs and how OHCHR could respond. Recommendations were made in a number of areas, including the security of non-governmental organizations and their capacity to carry out their activities, material needs, cooperation among African non-governmental organizations, cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner and United Nations organs and the specific problems of women's non-governmental organizations. The High Commissioner will be holding regular meetings with African non-governmental organizations.

C. Technical cooperation activities in Latin America and the Caribbean

26. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has supported initiatives aimed at reinforcing democratic systems and the rule of law in post-conflict situations in the Latin American and Caribbean region. Comprehensive technical cooperation country programmes are currently being implemented in Guatemala and El Salvador. Both initiatives are complementary to the work of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the United Nations Secretariat in facilitating negotiations that led to the signing of peace agreements in both countries. After at least a decade of human rights monitoring through special rapporteurs and independent experts, the Office signed an agreement of human rights cooperation with both Governments. The Office is engaged in providing advisory services for the revision of domestic legislation, strengthening of national institutions, building of national capacities and dissemination of information. To facilitate the implementation of technical cooperation, the Office has a field presence in each country.

27. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner has signed a technical cooperation agreement with the Government of Haiti and is exploring the possibility of using the capacity of the International Civilian Mission to Haiti (MICIVIH) to implement the agreement. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner in Colombia has been providing advisory services to various national institutions engaged in the promotion and protection of human rights at the domestic level.

28. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has also emphasized cooperation with key partners of the United Nations system in the region. The Office cooperates with UNDP in Bolivia, Guatemala, El

Salvador, Panama and Paraguay; with UNESCO and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in El Salvador and Guatemala; with the United Nations Institute for Crime Prevention and the Treatment of Offenders (ILANUD) in Central America and Panama; and most recently with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), by providing its full support to a campaign initiated in Latin America to combat violence against women. A close working relationship has been established with international non-governmental organizations active in the region. The Office continues discussions with the Organization of American States (OAS), the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and the Inter-American Institute for Human Rights, to promote and establish closer cooperation through joint initiatives under consideration by the parties.

D. National institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights

29. Support for the establishment of independent national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights is a central component of the human rights programme. In April the Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions met in Geneva to strengthen links between member institutions and support work aimed at establishing new national institutions. The First Mediterranean Meeting of National Institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights took place in Morocco in April, with the participation of national institutions from the region, from other regions such as Latin America and Africa, and with observers from Governments and non-governmental organizations. Most recently, the Second African Conference of National Institutions took place from 30 June to 3 July in Durban, South Africa. In addition to detailed discussions of issues relating to the establishment and functioning of national institutions, the Durban meeting considered its contribution to the OAU Ministerial Conference on Human and Peoples' Rights in Africa. Each of these meetings was supported by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and in each the High Commissioner participated.

V. Mainstreaming human rights

30. Mainstreaming human rights throughout the United Nations system continues to be a priority. Increasingly close relationships are being established with the agencies and programmes of the system directly and through the work of the Executive Committees and the Senior Management Group. Work is being carried out with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) relating to the right to food and with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) regarding the right to adequate housing.

31. Cooperation is growing between the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Office of the High Commissioner. In May a high-level seminar was organized by the Secretary-General of UNCTAD in consultation with the Office to discuss the right to development and its implementation. Senior staff of UNCTAD, including the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General took part, as did the Deputy High Commissioner and senior staff of the Office. They were joined by a leading university professor, senior ambassadors familiar with the issues and experts from the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights for a discussion of the right to development and up-grading economic and social rights. Subsequently, a joint meeting between the staff of UNCTAD and the Office of the High Commissioner took place to discuss human rights and the challenges of economic development.

VI. Conclusion

32. The above paragraphs, highlighting some of the more important recent developments in the human rights programme, affirm that the programme is an increasingly dynamic one, with many new areas of concern and many new demands on its limited resources. It has not been possible to reflect all advances in the programme in the limited space of this report; many will be reflected in other reports to the Council.

Notes

[1] General Assembly resolution 217 A (III).

[2] See E/1998/27, Supplement No. 7.

[3] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4–15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

[4] See A/CONF.157/23.

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New York, 6-31 July 1998
Agenda item 7 (d)
Coordination, programme and other questions: international cooperation in the field of informatics

Letter dated 8 July 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

I would like to draw your attention to General Assembly resolution 52/233 of 26 June 1998 entitled "Global implications of the year 2000 date conversion problem of computers", in paragraph 5 of which the Assembly:

> "*Calls upon* the Economic and Social Council to prepare at its substantive session of 1998 guidelines on which Member States will be able to draw in addressing the diverse aspects of the year 2000 problem".

I have no doubt that you will take the necessary measures to ensure that the Council prepares the required guidelines by the end of its current substantive session. In an effort to help in this process, I attach suggested draft guidelines, which have been prepared by the Task Force of the Working Group on Informatics, and request that this letter and its annex be circulated as an official document of the Council under agenda item 7 (d).

(Signed) Ahmad **Kamal**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

98-19798 (E) 090798

Annex

Suggested guidelines for addressing the year 2000 problem

The objective of the present paper is to raise the awareness of Governments on the year 2000 problem and compile a general list of issues that should be considered in this context. The problem stems from the fact that many hardware and software systems use only the last two digits to identify the year. If not converted by the target date, 31 December 1999, those systems will recognize "00" not as the year 2000 but instead as the year 1900. Electronic systems which are not year 2000 compliant and involve processes based on dates will either shut down, produce meaningless and misleading results, or revert to some other date, as a result of which whole sectors of the economy and critical government operations could experience significant disruptions.

Although there is an abundance of material available on the Internet from expert groups and government and private institutions warning about the impact of the date issue, it is felt that there is still a need to stress the complexity of the problem. The problem could affect not only businesses and Governments but also international cooperation. If one partner in a private or intergovernmental network is not year 2000 compliant, this could create a domino effect, causing the whole network of cooperation to break down and affecting even compliant segments. There is also a misconception that the problem is limited to computer systems. In fact, all equipment configurations with embedded systems that are using code or chips and involve handling of dates could be affected. The misunderstanding that the year 2000 problem is a problem of individual computer systems has led to the belief that it can be left to technical experts to find solutions. But the recognition that the millennium bug affects a wide range of different systems and the possibility of a domino effect has led to the understanding that the year 2000 problem is also a management problem.

The present brief note attempts to summarize the issues involved and provide general guidelines for attacking the problem; for more detailed information, readers are referred to the Internet and the other sources of information mentioned above. Although the four-step procedure outlined below is geared to government institutions, most of it applies equally to the private sector.

1. Problem awareness

- Governments and international organizations, at the highest level, should announce their commitment to meeting the year 2000 challenge. Progress should be publicly reported at regular intervals.
- A year 2000 awareness campaign should be initiated to target groups, such as small businesses and local government agencies, that may still not be aware of the issue and its complexities.
- A comprehensive year 2000 strategy should be developed that would allow Governments to address the problem in a coordinated manner. The strategic recommendations should be translated into tactical objectives by local governments or executing agents.
- Cooperation between Governments and the private sector should be initiated at all levels of government, including national and international levels of government.

2. Problem assessment

- A management structure should be put in place that assigns clear responsibility and authority for addressing the various aspects of the problem.
- Year 2000 compliance should be clearly defined in operational terms, and standards should be established for determining what constitutes compliance. For critical systems, a formal certification procedure should be considered.
- Some consensus regarding the order of criticality of processes should be reached. Criteria to be considered are: preventing loss of life, allowing effective government, maintaining civil order, avoiding large-scale hardship, allowing continuation of commercial activities, preventing environmental damage, etc.
- Sectors of the infrastructure and systems of national importance for which compliance must be assured should be identified. The list should include but not be limited to transport and communication, utilities, finance, national security, public health, nuclear facilities and international relations.
- Each organization responsible for providing critical services should be encouraged or required to develop a plan to solve their year 2000 problems. The plan should outline steps to be taken in systems assessment, repair, testing, implementation and coordination with other entities.
- For areas that are not of primary national importance, a risk analysis should be carried out to establish an order of priority for assuring compliance. It is now recognized that 100 per cent compliance will be difficult to achieve. For low-risk areas where non-compliance will have little impact, action could be delayed.
- To avoid a domino effect, interdependencies between systems of low priority and areas of national importance must be identified.
- The interface between national systems and the systems of other Governments should be defined. Particular attention should also be given to private-sector service providers (communication, air traffic control, power supply etc.) who operate on a regional or global level but are an integral part of the national infrastructure.
- Mechanisms for disseminating candid information about the status of remediation should be established.
- Questions regarding public and private-sector liability for damages resulting from non-compliance and warranty issues should be investigated.

3. Problem solution

- Validation strategies and testing procedures for all converted systems or replaced systems and their components should be established.
- A manpower analysis should be carried out to determine the human resources required for the conversion. Many countries, especially developing countries, are already experiencing a shortage of skilled information technology workers. This problem will be aggravated by the year 2000 issue. Developing countries will be particularly vulnerable.
- Budgetary provisions must be made to secure funds for new hardware, conversion software, human resources and related costs. Further, the financial responsibility for the cost of conversion must be determined. Some countries may consider funding by international organizations, especially the World Bank, which has grant loan funds available.

- Suppliers and designers of systems should be identified and integrated into the validation and testing process, whenever possible.
- Applying the validation and testing process established earlier, systems will be certified or steps to convert systems will be taken according to their priority. Since problems and their solution may be similar across applications and processes, a mechanism for information exchange and consolidation of activities should be established at the national and international levels.

4. Contingency planning

- Governments should establish general contingency plans for all systems and activities of national importance and the systems that support them for continuity of operations. Back-up arrangements should be made at the national and international levels.
- A hotline should be established for the public to report possible millennium-related problems and obtain assistance in case of emergencies.
- The disaster recovery plans of all systems should be reviewed and updated to avoid loss of data and ensure the resumption of operation as soon as possible.
- In case year 2000 compliance cannot be achieved before 31 December 1999, some critical systems may have to be temporarily decommissioned and replaced by back-up processes. Planning for establishing back-up processes should start immediately for critical infrastructure systems. It is important to determine how far in advance such plans will need to be implemented to be effective in the event that the deadline cannot be met.

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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Advancement of women

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: questions relating to refugees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions

Promotion and protection of the rights of children

Human rights questions

Economic and Social Council
Substantive session of 1998
Agenda item 5

Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance

Letter dated 9 July 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of the appeal adopted by the republican meeting devoted to the problems of refugees and internally displaced persons in Azerbaijan to the heads of States, Parliaments and international organizations throughout the world, issued at Baku on 27 June 1998 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under items 20, 106, 108, 109, 113 of the provisional agenda, and as a document of the substantive session of 1998 of the Economic and Social Council, under item 5 of the provisional agenda.

(*Signed*) Eldar G. **Kouliev**
Permanent Representative

* A/53/150

98-20125 (E) 130798

Annex

To the Heads of States, Parliaments and international organizations throughout the world

We, the participants in the republican meeting devoted to the problems of refugees and internally displaced persons in the Republic of Azerbaijan, want to draw your attention to the intolerable condition of over a million refugees who have been driven from their historical territories as a result of the policy of ethnic cleansing of Armenia carried out at the State level and to the plight of the internally displaced Azerbaijanis who have lost over 20 per cent of their native lands and have unwillingly become internally displaced persons at a time when the ending of the bloody conflicts of our planet has become the common concern of all peace-loving mankind.

In the twentieth century, the Azerbaijan people have several times felt the grievous results of the policy of genocide pursued by Armenia in connection with the latter's territorial claims to Azerbaijan, subjecting the Azerbaijanis to mass deportations and massacres.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, from 1905 to 1907, tens of thousands of Azerbaijanis were murdered because of their nationality, their houses and mosques put to fire, historical monuments destroyed and their houses lost to them.

In March of 1918, about 30,000 Azerbaijanis were killed by armed Armenian detachments, with unimaginable brutality, in Baku; 7,000 were slaughtered in Shamakhi; 122 villages were completely destroyed in the province of Guba; mass murders took place.

The mass deportation of Azerbaijanis from the territory of Armenia from 1948 to 1953 was a historical crime committed against our nation. The adoption of a special resolution by the Council of Ministers of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the deportation of Azerbaijanis from the territory of Armenia to Azerbaijan in 1947 was one of the achievements of Armenia, enabling Armenia to carry out a policy of ethnic cleansing at the State level.

In 1988, Armenia began a new stage of its occupation policy against Azerbaijan, with an obvious help of its supporters. Over 250,000 Azerbaijanis were driven from their historical-ethnic lands in Armenia within a few days, with unimaginable cruelty and violence.

Thus, in essence, the groundless territorial claims against Azerbaijan gave birth to the known Upper Garabag conflict, started by a group of Armenian separatists.

Since 1991, the Upper Garabag and the adjoining districts of Azerbaijan have been subjected to the intervention of armed Armenian detachments, 17,000 square kilometres of territory have been occupied, over 900 towns and villages, 600 schools and educational institutions, 100,000 houses, 250 medical institutions, 1,000 industrial enterprises, religious and cultural monuments, railways, bridges and cemeteries have been destroyed and plundered.

About 20,000 Azerbaijanis have been killed in the Upper Garabag conflict, over 50,000 physically injured and thousands of old men, women and children taken hostages and subjected to the intolerable suffering of captivity.

In 1992, an action of brutality, using the most extreme and unimaginable punitive methods, was committed against the peaceful civilians in the town of Khojaly: 800 people were killed. It is known in history as the genocide of Khojaly.

As a result of the Armenian aggression, over a million people have found shelters in tent camps, prefabricated houses, railway carriages and other places not fit for living.

Armenia completely ignores the resolutions of the Security Council (822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993), 884 (1993)) and acts against the will of the world community.

The States of the world are well aware of the consistent, principal and decisive policy and constructive position of the Republic of Azerbaijan directed to the fair solution of the Upper Garabag conflict. The main principles for the peaceful solution of the conflict through negotiations were approved by 53 States at the Lisbon summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in December of 1996.

The Azerbaijan people and we, the refugees and internally displaced persons, who have witnessed the horrors of the war, are against the war. We denounce all kinds of ethnic separation and national conflicts, we want to live in peace with our neighbours and to enjoy ordinary human rights.

Nevertheless, we, the participants at this meeting, want to focus your attention on the fact that the present administration of Armenia has determined to join the Upper Garabag to Armenia, which contradicts the Charter of the United Nations and the objective principles of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and other influential international organizations concerning the peaceful solution of the conflict. We, the refugees and displaced persons, as well as the whole Azerbaijani nation, express our protest and anger against such statements.

We believe that the voice of over a million of the Azerbaijani refugees and displaced persons will be heard and that the world community, Parliaments and international organizations will put political, economic and diplomatic pressure on Armenia.

We are inhabitants of the same planet and must jointly fight against those who threaten our common house with death and blood. We hope that the world community, Parliaments and international organizations will support the restoration of justice for the sake of the happy future of nations who will step into the twenty-first century, for the sake of justice and the triumph of the highest human goals.

We are for a peaceful solution of the Upper Garabag conflict, and, once more, express our confidence that, as a result of the joint efforts of the world community, Parliaments, international organizations, the territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan will be provided, the refugees and the internally displaced persons will return to their native homes!